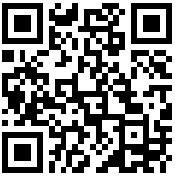
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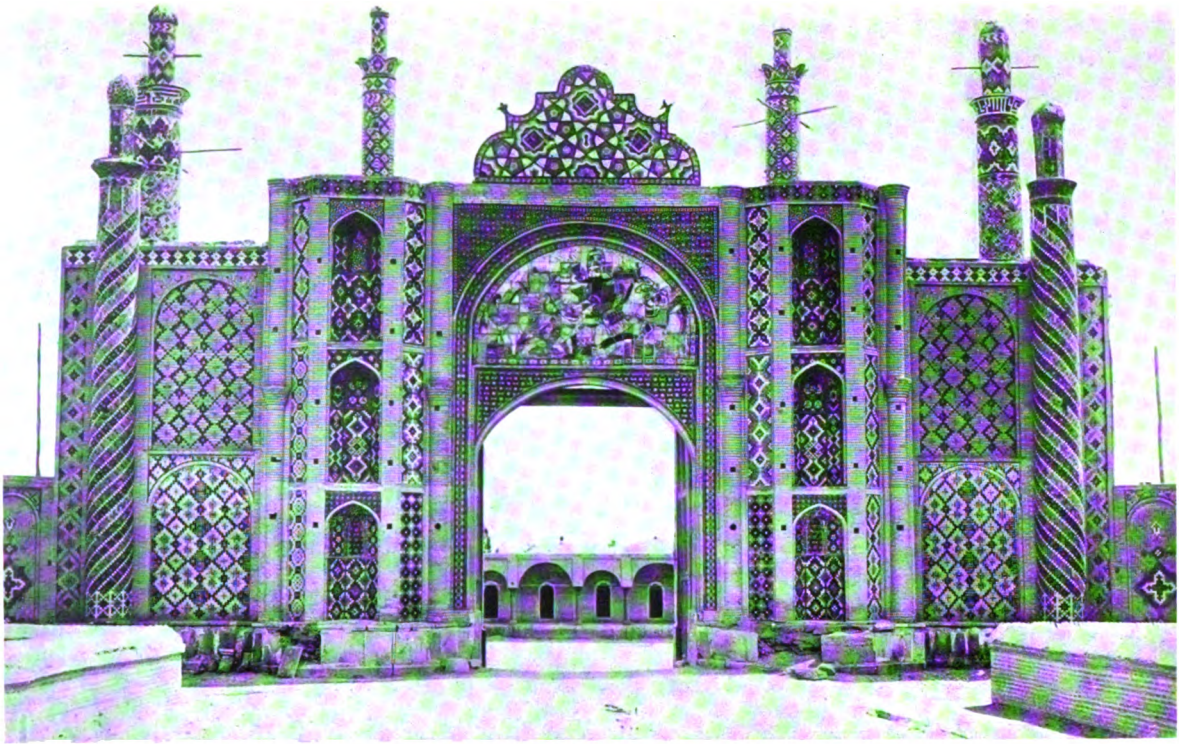
EAST PERSIA

A BACKWATER OF THE GREAT WAR

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A Typical Gate of a Persian Town.

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EAST PERSIA

A BACKWATER OF THE GREAT WAR

BY

BRIG.-GENERAL W. E. R. DICKSON,

C.M.G., C.I.E., *retired*

Late Inspector-General of Communications in East Persia.

ILLUSTRATED

LONDON

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1924

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PREFACE

Among the many " side shows " of the Great War, there were probably few where problems of so complex a character were presented for solution as in East Persia. A country little known before the war, practically unsurveyed, with extremes of temperature, general absence of supplies, forms of disease not commonly met with, and great distances from available bases, was productive of conditions and difficulties that could not always be dealt with according to normal or stereotyped methods. It is thought, therefore, that a few sketches of the work of the East Persian Line of Communications and of conditions of service in that part of the world, though they relate to but a small backwater of the great flood that surged through the world from 1914 to 1918, may be of interest not only to the military, but also to the general reader.

I feel also that it is due to the splendid body of officers, non-commissioned officers and men, British and Indian, whom it was my privilege to command in East Persia, that something should be known of the difficulties they surmounted and the hardships they underwent cheerfully, all " doing their bit " with the energy characteristic of their countrymen during the great struggle, their task being if anything all

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the harder from realization of the fact that, in such a remote side show, their efforts, however great, could at best but contribute in a secondary degree to the success of the cause all were striving for. It would be invidious in this connection to mention names, but I cannot refrain from a reference here to one of whom frequent mention will be made in these pages, the late Lieut.-Colonel Mark Synge, C.I.E., D.S.O., Assistant Director of Supplies and Transport in East Persia. An expert in all matters relating to his own service, a deep debt of gratitude is due to a man whose fertile brain never failed when expedients were needed to overcome some of the apparently insurmountable supply and transport difficulties which presented themselves. He had an exceptional gift for seeing silver linings to the darkest clouds, and his cheery companionship during our many journeys together up and down the long line for which I was responsible is to me an ineffaceable memory. His untimely death in 1921, due largely to the strain which he cheerfully bore in the service of the State in East Persia, was as great a loss to the Indian army as it was to his many friends.

My acknowledgments are due to Major Packenham Walsh, R.E., for a very valuable series of photographs which he took in East Persia, some of which have been reproduced in these pages, and to Sergt. F. W. Andrews, R.E., some of whose sketches have been made use of.

W. E. R. DICKSON.

ISLE, DUMFRIES.
1st March, 1924.

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Plan of the East Persian Line of Communications *at end*

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EAST PERSIA

CHAPTER I

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COUNTRY

The greater part of the area comprised within the term East Persia was, before the war, largely a *terra incognita*. The north-east corner around Meshed had been accessible from the Russian Transcaspian railway, and therefore in contact with Europe and Europeans. The fertile region in the south-east corner, known as Seistan, had come to notice as a bone of contention between Persia and Afghanistan, the dispute being settled by arbitrators appointed by the British Government. This latter region had, therefore, also come before the public eye. But the central and greater part of the area had been only occasionally visited by European travellers, and what was known of it was chiefly from the writings of consular officers like Colonels Yate and Kenyon, whose duties had taken them to those parts. As lately as 1907 an officer who had travelled to India via the Russian Transcaspian railway, Meshed, East Persia and Quetta was asked to

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lecture on his experiences at several stations in India, the feat being regarded as a remarkable one. What caused East Persia to emerge from its obscurity will be related in these pages, but in order that the reader may be better able to appreciate what has to be said on this subject, it is necessary to begin with a brief sketch of the physical features and other characteristics of this part of the world.

The greater part of Persia lies on an elevated plateau which extends eastwards over Afghanistan and westwards over part of Asia Minor. This plateau is, for the most part, an arid desert except where Nature has, so to speak, superimposed upon it blocks or strips of highlands. These highlands collect the snow in winter and absorbing the moisture obtained therefrom, act as reservoirs of water for the streams and channels, natural and artificial, on which agriculture depends for its existence. The fertile and inhabited parts of Persia are to be found, therefore, as a general rule, only in the valleys and around the edges of these highland tracts. Heavy falls of snow on the mountains in winter are hailed with delight by the inhabitants as harbingers of a plentiful supply of water for the spring crops. Rivers, which in most countries form the main source of water supply, are, with one or two exceptions, non-existent in Persia. As a result of the scantiness and precarious nature of their water supply, much ingenuity is displayed by the inhabitants in conserving and utilizing such water as is available. Deep

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wells are dug at the foot of the hills to tap springs and the water is then led in underground channels away from the hills, the depth of the channels decreasing as the ground falls, till it comes to the surface near the place where it is required for use. These underground channels serve the additional purpose of preventing evaporation and therefore waste of water in the dry atmosphere of the country. Long rows of mounds of earth with a well in the centre of each, marking the line of excavation of these underground channels, which are called *kanats*, are a characteristic feature of the Persian landscape. The same thing is to be seen around Quetta in British Baluchistan, where the water supply conditions approximate to those of Persia.

The highland tracts referred to above are found, speaking generally, placed round the circumference of the Persian plateau, the centre being left a flat, waterless, and largely salt desert. The highest of these highland regions is in the north, where the Elburz range averages 10,000 to 12,000 feet above sea-level, its highest peak, Demavend, near Tehran, being over 19,000. The level of the central part of the Persian plateau, and in places where highland blocks have not been superimposed upon it, is about 3,000.

Exceptions to the general nature of the Persian terrain, as described above, are to be found in three parts of the country. Along the shores of the Persian Gulf, in the south, is a strip of hot, low-lying

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country, known as the *Garmsir*. It is arid and unhealthy, and averages 100 miles in width from the sea coast to where the ground rises to the plateau. The northern provinces of Gilan, Mazanderan and Astrabad, lying between the Elburz range and the Caspian, are also low-lying and hot in summer, but otherwise totally different from the southern coastal region, being clothed with a rich vegetation, the result of the plentiful supply of water which the high peaks of the Elburz collect and pour by numerous streams into the Caspian. The third exception is also a low-lying tract, consisting of a depression in the Perso-Afghan plateau, in the corner where Persia, Afghanistan and Baluchistan meet. The central feature of this depression, the Hamun lakes, has been compared to three saucers, placed side by side one above the other, the edge of one just projecting over the rim of the one next below. The Helmund River, bringing down snow water from a highland tract in Central Afghanistan, empties itself into the uppermost saucer. If the year has been one of a good snowfall, the overflow passes into the second and then into the third saucer. From the lowest saucer runs an ancient channel, known as the *Sheila*, and bearing traces of having been the work of man in bygone ages, leading to a deep depression, called the *Gaud-i-Zirreh*, in the south-west corner of Afghanistan, which is capable of receiving and absorbing any water surplus to the capacity of the Hamun lakes. Adjoining these lakes,

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and owing its prosperity to their waters and those of the Helmund River, lies that fertile area, Seistan, the possession of which has been a cause of many quarrels between the neighbouring kingdoms of Persia and Afghanistan. Seistan is full of ancient remains, showing that in the past it must have borne a much larger population than it does to-day and than it could do to-morrow if stable conditions and means of disposing of its surplus produce gave a free rein to its capabilities.

East Persia, the part of the country we are more immediately concerned with in these pages, may be considered, from a geographical point of view, to consist of three portions, two highland blocks, north and south of each other, superimposed on the general plateau level and the Seistan depression just described.

The northerly of these two highland blocks lies in the north-east corner of Persia's territory and covers, approximately, the province of *Khorasan*. It consists of a series of parallel east and west ridges, highest in the centre and dropping, in the east towards Afghanistan, and in the west towards the Central Persian Desert. On the north the high ground drops to the plains and deserts of Turkestan and Central Asia. The northern ridges of the block extend westwards joining with that highland strip which runs right across Northern Persia, forming a bluff-like edge to the Persian plateau and separating it from the low-lying regions of the Caspian and Central Asia.

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The southerly of the two East Persian highland blocks covers roughly the province known as the *Qainat*, and is separated from the northerly or Khorasan block of highlands by a tongue of the Central Persian Desert which extends, between the two blocks, eastwards into Afghanistan. To the east and south-east of the Qainat highland block, lies the third of our geographical subdivisions of East Persia, the great depression in which is situated Seistan. On the west of the Qainat lies the waterless region known as the *Lut*, really part of the great Central Persian Desert. On the south the Qainat highlands break up into a series of barren Aden-like hills, continued into and characteristic of Persian Baluchistan and the eastern parts of the Kerman province. East of the Seistan depression lies a waterless desert, which continues as one proceeds eastwards along the Balucho-Afghan frontier until one reaches the higher ground in the neighbourhood of Quetta.

The highest parts of both the Khorasan and Qainat highlands run to 10,000 feet above sea-level, the passes being between 7,000 and 8,000. The snowfall is much greater in the Khorasan hills than in those of the Qainat; the water supply, and consequently the fertility, is much greater. In Khorasan, and especially in the valleys running from Meshed along the Atrak River towards the Caspian, supplies of meat, grain and fodder are plentiful. In the Qainat the supplies are much more restricted,

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the lesser snowfall giving a smaller water supply capable of irrigating a proportionately smaller area of crops. A certain dependence is, in fact, placed here on rain for crops, and when this fails distress is apt to be acute. In the barren area to the south of the Qainat highlands practically nothing is obtainable. Seistan is of course, for its size, rich in supplies, but its situation is that of an oasis surrounded by an inhospitable wilderness.

The climate of a region possessing such varied physical features is naturally equally varied in character. At Meshed in the summer months the want of the Indian *punkah* was often felt, in winter the cold is almost arctic. Forty degrees of frost were often registered; blizzards and frost-bite were a constant source of anxiety to our convoys. In the Qainat the conditions were similar, though the cold seldom reached the intensity of that in the Khorasan passes. In the southern part of the area the heat of summer rivalled, in its intensity, that of the winter cold of the northern portion. Temperatures of 126° in the shade were not unusual at the post of Hurmukh. Seistan and the area adjoining it had its speciality in the shape of its famous *bad-i-sad-o-bist roz*, or "wind of 120 days." The joys of this wind, which blows continuously from May to August, have to be experienced to be understood. Imagine oneself in a hurricane where an effort is needed to stand upright, the heat that of a furnace-room in a foundry, and the air filled with sand to the

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consistency and darkness of a November fog in London, and some idea may be formed of the *sad-o-bist* at its best. Every tree in Seistan grows with a permanent curve to the southward, a tribute to the power of this demon wind. When considering the possibility of improvements to the roads in Seistan, which were low-lying and apt to become soft, I was informed that it was useless to try and bank up or metal roads in Seistan as the *sad-o-bist* would soon have such excrescences off. A wall that was built in one place had heaped up against it, during the course of a single night, a ramp of earth and sand right to the top, rendering it useless as a means of preventing ingress. Buildings and walls in Seistan are, as a matter of fact, placed as far as possible on the leeward side of wet or marshy tracts, which fortunately abound. This seemed to be the only way of defeating the earth-heaping propensities of the *sad-o-bist*. The only thing that can be said in favour of the demon is that it has chosen the least inconvenient time of the year to come abroad, viz., after the spring crops are gathered and before the autumn sowings have begun. Otherwise it would speedily reduce Seistan, notwithstanding its ample water supply, to the arid condition of the surrounding country. During the winter months, while the demon is hibernating, the climate of Seistan is delightful and can best be compared to the "cold weather" of plain stations in Northern India.

Trees and vegetation, over the greater part of

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East Persia, are scanty. In Khorasan, in the northern and north-western parts of the province, there is a considerable amount of vegetation, especially as the well-wooded shores of the Caspian are approached. In cultivated areas, the streams are generally bordered with willow and poplar. As one proceeds southward, the vegetation becomes more scanty, though wild pistachio and stunted shrubs are plentiful on most of the hills. In the Qainat, as may be expected from its lesser water supply, vegetation is still more scanty. Trees, generally of the usual willow and poplar type, are found only in the immediate vicinity of springs and watercourses. The absence of scrub in any great quantity in the hills made fuel supply for our posts in the Qainat at times a matter of some difficulty. At one time this difficulty of fuel led to an animated controversy between the supply and medical services on the line. The former wished to issue camel dung, in the absence of wood, as fuel for cooking purposes, the latter objected to the practice as being insanitary.

"Necessity is the mother of invention," and this proverb is well exemplified in the Qainat by the manner in which the inhabitants roof their dwellings, timber not being available for doing this in the usual manner. They roof their huts with domes constructed of mud bricks. The men building these domes, or *gumbaz* as they are called, work with extraordinary rapidity and skill. They use no cen-

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tering, working entirely by eye. Work is commenced at the four corners of the walls of each hut and is given the necessary curve inwards by slightly raising the outside edge of each brick, as it is laid, with mud mortar. Growing thus, the work from each corner eventually meets at a point in the centre. The skill needed to get evenly curved domes, purely by eye—and which these gumbazers always seem to do—can well be imagined. The dome completed, the outside is first plastered with *siah gil*, or black mud, and finally with *kah gil*, or straw mud, i.e. mud mixed with chopped straw. The roof is then considered rain- and snow-proof. These roofs certainly are weather-proof, and they are warm in winter and cool in summer. The gumbazer at work is an interesting sight to watch. Seated on a scaffold, he keeps up a chant as he works, a brick being thrown up to him by an assistant below each time he comes round to the appropriate part of the chant. The villages in the Qainat, being merely collections of these earth-domed huts, present, from a distance, the appearance of gigantic ant heaps, unlike anything seen elsewhere. In Khorasan, where timber is obtainable, the gumbaz is not so universal, flat mud roofs on wooden beams being seen in increasing frequency the farther one goes north.

To the dryness and apparently, in consequence, the germ-killing properties of her climate, Persia owes the fact that her population has not long ago been wiped out of existence and permits her to be

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content with sanitary measures that would be severely punished by Nature elsewhere. In most Persian villages, and towns too for the matter of that, are to be found a stream or strèams, which serve the combined purposes of a drinking-water supply, a washhouse, a dustbin, and a latrine. It almost made the hair turn grey of some of our medical officers who arrived new to the country. And yet with it the population seems to thrive. Diseases there are and plenty of them, especially those of the lice-borne character, such as typhus. Cholera also arrives when it appears to Nature that the population wants thinning off a bit. But on the whole the people, who are inured to it, seem to get along all right. It is, of course, quite otherwise with people coming from outside and accustomed, as our troops had been, to proper sanitary conditions. Contact with the local population and their dwellings was a constant source of anxiety to the medical service. But apart from general insanitary conditions, East Persia provided a special treat for our medical officers in the shape of the "Miani bug." A mysterious and virulent form of relapsing fever had for some time been a source of both curiosity and anxiety to medical officers on the line. Cases were becoming unpleasantly frequent as troops were increased in numbers in East Persia. The climax came when almost the entire personnel of a convoy that arrived at Qain from the north went down with the mysterious complaint. Captain Harold, R.A.M.C., who

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had newly arrived as D.A.D.M.S. for sanitation, took up the matter with his characteristic energy. He followed the tracks of the stricken convoy, step by step, back to their starting-point, without finding any special cause beyond the all-prevailing general insanitary conditions. He eventually found the clue in an old book in the library of the Consulate-General at Meshed, in which a traveller in Western Persia gave an illustration of a bug prevalent in those parts, and particularly at a place called Miani, the bite of which produced relapsing fever with symptoms similar to those we had met with. Armed with this information and burning with enthusiasm, Harold started off on a new bug hunt with redoubled vigour, and this time was rewarded with complete success. The Miani bug, of the true and original species, was found to be plentiful in East Persia, and a serai, two marches south of Turbat, where the stricken convoy had passed a night on its march down, was infested with it. That it had not been discovered sooner as the origin of our troubles was due to two causes. One was that the local inhabitants did not seem to suffer much from it, either because they had become immune as the result of prolonged inoculation, or because the animal had grown tired of the taste of home-grown blood and preferred that of strangers. The second was that the beast, in common with other evil-doers, preferred to work its deeds in darkness and shunned the light. This trait of its character facilitated countering its

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action. It was found that if a light was kept burning all night it would not emerge from its hiding-places, and a standing order was issued that if found necessary to pass the night in a strange serai, or house, this should be done. Harold having discovered the cause of the mysterious malady, the necessary steps could be taken, and the cases of relapsing fever rapidly diminished in number. But that the bug was ever ready to catch us unawares was exemplified by the case of a company of pioneers, working some time later on the road between Turbat and Meshed. Though warned against taking shelter in Persian serais, the officer commanding the company thought it the lesser of two evils to do this than to keep his men in the open during a cold spell of weather which suddenly came upon them. The bulk of that company were *hors de combat* in hospital for nearly two months in consequence.

In parts of East Persia there is certainly considerable mineral wealth, which would appear worthy of serious investigation whenever there is a prospect of something better than the backs of camels and donkeys being available for taking the produce of the country to where it can be made use of. Officers who had made a study of mineralogy told me that they had been much struck with the appearances of ore of different kinds in several places. In the hills to the south-west of Meshed there was certainly coal in some quantity, and some was brought into Meshed. There was also, apparently, iron and silver

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in the same hills, the value of which would be enhanced by the close proximity of coal, should conditions permit of workings being undertaken here. The turquoise mines of Nishapur are famous. In other parts of East Persia, and notably north of Duzdab, the present terminus of the railway from India, were found deep horizontal and vertical borings. People, even in ancient times, presumably did not dig 250 feet for the fun of the thing.

As in other parts of Persia, the manufacture of carpets is a national industry. Looms are worked in most large towns and villages of East Persia, and notably at Birjand and Durush. The East Persian carpets, as in the case of those made in other districts, have their local peculiarities and specialities, by which they can be distinguished. The type of pattern is the feature by which East Persian carpets are most readily recognizable and is a very attractive one, unlike anything made in other districts, except perhaps Tabriz, where a type of pattern akin to that of East Persia seems to be in vogue. The East Persian carpet industry suffered severely as a result of the war. The ordinary means of exporting their produce having been cut off, the majority of the looms had to close down and their skilled hands dispersed to find a livelihood by other means. It will be some time, so I was told, before the industry can hope to regain its pre-war volume.

The inhabitants of the towns and villages in East Persia are typical of the settled portion of the popu-

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NASIR-UD-DIN.
ACCEDED ... ...1848.
ASSASSINATED...1896.



MOZUFFER-ED-DIN.
ACCEDED ... ...1896.
DIED ... . 1907.



MAHOMED ALI.
ACCEDED ... ...1907.
DEPOSED ... ...1909.



SULTAN AHMED.
ACCEDED ... ...1909.
WHOM GOD PRESERVE.

THE FOUR MONARCHS OF MODERN PERSIA.

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lation of the rest of the country, peaceable, polite, hospitable, and not over-fond of work or the truth. But interspersed amongst them are bands of roving robbers. In the northern part of the area these bands are probably of Turkoman origin, certain parts of East Persia having been regarded formerly as happy hunting grounds by the Turkoman tribes of Transcaspia and Persian territory adjoining. In the southern part of the area these bands come from the roving tribes which form the bulk of the population of Persian Baluchistan. The northern raiders gave us little trouble after the occupation of the country by our troops, though they had, from all accounts, been very much *en évidence* previously. After the establishment of the line of communications, neither military convoys nor the travelling Persian public experienced any annoyance in this area. The raiders from the south, however, especially during the period of the Afghan War in 1919, gave us trouble from time to time. There were more of them and they had a more favourable area to work from and retreat to.

Khorasan forms a province under a Governor-General, appointed by the Persian Government at Tehran. The Qainat and Seistan form a hereditary governorship, nominally subject to, but practically independent of, the Governor-General of Khorasan. The Governor of the Qainat and Seistan resides at Birjand and administers the Qainat personally, while he rules Seistan through a deputy. The provinces

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are divided into areas under deputy-governors, these again subdivided into *buluks*, or districts, the ultimate unit in the administration being the village under its headman, or *kadkhuda*. A peculiarity of Persian administration is the existence at the larger centres of a *Karguzar*, or representative of the Foreign Office, who is supposed to conduct all dealings with foreigners. Strictly speaking, therefore, the Karguzar should have been the medium for all dealings of our troops in the country with the inhabitants, but this principle was one that was more honoured in the breach than in the observance. As the Karguzar corresponded direct with Tehran on matters appertaining to his duties, there was often some jealousy between him and the local governor or deputy-governor, especially where matters affecting contracts for supplies were concerned. In practice Karguzars were found to be, according to their own and the local governor's personalities, either very useful liaison adjuncts, nonentities, or intolerable nuisances.

A general description of the country would be incomplete without a reference to its fauna. Ibex, wild sheep and gazelle are plentiful. The ibex are of the variety known in India as the "Sind ibex," the broad edge of the horn, which is triangular in section, being at the back instead of in front, as in the case of the Himalayan variety. Considerable herds of these ibex were seen by the survey parties which traversed regions off the beaten track, and good sport

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could have been obtained had time and opportunity been available for shooting trips off the line, which was not the case. I saw a very fine head, shot in the hills east of Qain by the Hishmet-ed-Dowleh, cousin of the Governor, which measured 65 inches. The wild sheep are akin to the oorial of India, but carry rather thicker horns. They were plentiful in the hills throughout the area. The Persian gazelle was a very familiar sight in parts of the country that adjoined desert tracks. Panther and bears were said to exist in the hills, but were seldom seen. Small game was plentiful in most parts of the area occupied by our troops and afforded welcome changes of diet from the usual ration meat. Large flocks of blue rock pigeons used to haunt the road seeking grain and other attractions dropped by passing camel convoys. The large (Imperial or black-bellied) sand grouse were also numerous, and at first, until they got to appreciate the meaning of a European's gun, were extraordinarily tame. They were most plentiful in the autumn and spring, being then apparently migrating. But a certain number remained throughout the year, for I have myself seen broods of young grouse on the higher plateaux about Shusp. On the lower ground, near the Hamun, the ordinary small, and the pintailed, sand grouse were frequently seen, besides a small variety with mottled brown plumage. The *chukor* of India, known as *kabk* in Persia, was of course found in the higher hills, and that delicate little partridge, the *see-see* of India or *tehu* of Persia,

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in his usual haunts among foothills. The latter were extraordinarily plentiful in the valleys around Hurmukh and Robat, as many as thirty having been shot by one gun in the course of an evening's stroll from Hurmukh. The Hamun lakes teem with wild-fowl in winter and excellent sport is obtainable there. Mallard and teal were met with during cold weather all over East Persia, wherever there were streams or ponds. Seistan is the haunt in some numbers of the black partridge or francolin. Woodcock, which are numerous on the wooded shores of the Caspian, found their way in winter to East Persia. Any garden which was walled in, and therefore quiet, and had a stream running through it, generally held a couple of cock at times when there was snow on the ground. The plains round Meshed are one of the few localities where the great bustard is still to be found in any numbers, and the circumventing of this fine but wily game bird is one of the consolations of those whose lot is cast for a time in this out-of-the-way part of the world. When settled conditions prevail and such an idea is a feasibility, East Persia would well repay a few months' sporting trip. Those interested in the subject are referred to Colonel Kenyon's *Sport and Travel in East Persia*, which will be found most fascinating reading.

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CHAPTER II

EVENTS IN PERSIA PRIOR TO AND AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE GREAT WAR

During the ten years preceding the Great War, internal conditions in Persia were in a very unsettled state. The death of Nasir-ud-din Shah in 1896, at the hands of an assassin, deprived the country of a ruler who, whatever his faults may have been, had kept order in the country for nearly half a century. After the death of Nasir-ud-din, popular discontent became rife and culminated in the demand for a constitution, which Nasir-ud-din's successor, Mozuffer-ed-din Shah, acquiesced in almost on his death-bed. The next Shah, Mahomed Ali, attempted to strangle the newly-born constitution, but his attempt, though meeting at first with success, ended with his deposition. Then followed a period during which the constitutional government endeavoured to evolve order out of the prevailing chaos in the country.

Any detailed account of pre-war events in Persia would be outside the scope of the subject with which these pages deal, and they will only be touched on to the extent necessary to make clear the course

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of events which led to the situation in East Persia with which we are concerned.

Persia under Nasir-ud-din was an autocratic monarchy, and while it can be argued, with much reason and force, that a beneficent autocracy is the best form of government for countries that are not fully developed, it has the obvious defect that its value depends on the character and capabilities of one individual. So long as that one individual retains his health and energies, all is well. But once the ruling brain, from old age or other causes, grows dim, and the strong hand that held things together loses its vigour, disintegration sets in and matters gradually go from bad to worse. And so it was with Persia under Nasir-ud-din Shah. During the greater part of his reign Persia was, on the whole, remarkably well governed. Conditions were not, of course, ideal according to modern ideas or anything like it, but lawlessness was vigorously suppressed, and the lives and property of the inhabitants were reasonably safe. But towards the latter end of his reign, his firm grip on the affairs of state began to relax, with the inevitable result that the administration became disorganized, the treasury got empty, lawlessness and petty oppression increased, and general discontent spread. Had Nasir-ud-din been succeeded by a young and vigorous Shah, things might have been pulled together, but Mozuffer-ed-din was past his prime, and in feeble health, when he came to the throne. His health necessitated visits to Europe,

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with resultant drains on the already too depleted treasury. Popular discontent increased, lulled from time to time by promises of reforms, which were not carried out. Then came suddenly the demand for a constitution. It was as if a sick person, feeling himself ill and not being sure of the reason, suddenly discovers what he believes to be the cause, demands and grows enthusiastic over the remedy that he feels sure will cure him. The constitution demanded was granted and popular discontent allayed, thanks largely to British mediation, and Britain acquired at the time great popularity for the assistance she was regarded as having rendered to the movement. Mozuffer-ed-din died shortly after signing the constitution and was succeeded by his son, Mahomed Ali, a man of very different temperament. His ambition was to rule in the old style, and had he come to the throne some decades earlier, he might have gone down to history as one of Persia's great Shahs. The hands of the clock cannot, however, be turned back, and the mistake he made was in not realizing and accepting this fact. He set to work to undo the constitution, and met for a time with some success. Repressive measures, if carried out with vigour, will always meet with success for a time, but the success can only be permanent if other means are taken simultaneously to remove the roots whence sprang the discontent causing the movement that needed repression. Had the repression of the constitution been accompanied by measures of reform

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alleviating the conditions which gave rise to the original demand for it, it is possible Mahomed Ali might have enjoyed a period of rule under the old conditions. But nothing of this kind was attempted, and the result was that popular feeling burst forth again with redoubled vigour as a consequence of its repression. Help for the constitutionalists came from the provinces, the Shah was deposed, his twelve-year-old son placed on the throne, a regent appointed and the constitution came back to its own.

Mention must now be made of another factor which exercised a predominating influence on the fate of Persia at this time, viz., Russia and Russian policy. To understand the part which Russia has played in Persia it is necessary to look deeper than the superficial causes to which her actions are usually ascribed. Russia is a great self-contained country, possessing within her own borders all the essentials for building up a prosperous nation with one exception—free outlets to the open sea. Her ports are either ice-bound in winter, as in the case of those in the north, or commanded by the territorial waters of another power, as in the case of the Black Sea ports. History has shown that access to the sea is an almost indispensable factor in building up prosperity, and to reach the " warm water " has been a traditional ambition of Russia since the time of Peter the Great. There were obviously three directions in which this ambition could be satisfied without

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encroaching on the territory of powerful neighbours, viz., the Mediterranean via the Balkans, the Pacific via China, or the Indian Ocean via the Persian Gulf. That most coveted and which was striven for the most was the Mediterranean outlet. So long as this prize appeared a possibility only secondary efforts were made in other directions, and only as obstacles multiplied across the route to the Mediterranean did squeezing against Persia increase. The wars between Russia and Persia in the early part of the nineteenth century served to give the former the command of the Caspian and to impress Persia with a due sense of the power of her northern neighbour. After this, Russian pressure on Persia relaxed till the Crimean War, the result of which was to put fresh obstacles in the way of her further move towards the Mediterranean. She then began squeezing in Central Asia and on Northern Persia, a process which was redoubled in vigour when, after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–79, the Mediterranean door seemed, for the time, to be more firmly shut than ever. Britain having been regarded as the power chiefly responsible for shutting the door on this occasion, Russian policy assumed that strongly anti-British bias which was a familiar feature of the time. Every effort was made to push forward in Central Asia and to obtain a predominating influence in Persia, the former by its veiled threat to India giving Russia a lever against Britain, the latter as a means of reaching the warm sea in a region where

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Britain would not be likely to obtain continental help in thwarting her.

These views of Russian motives underlying Russia's action in Persia I have obtained from conversations with Russians themselves, and they are given for what they are worth. They certainly appear to afford more logical motives for Russia's action in Persia than mere land hunger, and a desire in a power already possessing enormous tracts of undeveloped territory to add to them.

Looked at in this light, the part that Russia played in the events which have been described at the beginning of this chapter becomes, at all events, comprehensible. A Persia weak, in a lawless condition and with an empty treasury, would be a far preferable obstacle across Russia's route to the warm water than one growing stronger as the result of internal reforms. It is not to be wondered at, then, that all Russia's influence was wielded in opposition to the constitutional movement. As part of her policy of securing a controlling influence in Persia, Russia had obtained from Persia a convention under which a force of Cossacks was to be raised in Northern Persia under the name of the "Persian Cossacks," a force composed of Persians and paid for by Persia, but officered by Russians nominated by the Russian Government. The leverage that could be wielded by the control of such a force in a country possessing no troops worthy of the name can well be understood. This lever was placed in the hands of Mahomed Ali

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and constituted his chief asset in his struggle to overturn the constitution. After Mahomed Ali's fall, the force made its peace with the Constitutionalists, but was never fully trusted by them.

But while a regenerated Persia, which the constitutional movement appeared to give some hope of achieving in time, was not a thing that could be viewed favourably in Russian eyes, it was, on the contrary, highly desirable from the point of view of British interests. That the sympathies of the two powers leaned to opposite sides in the constitutional struggle was therefore only natural. But a new factor now entered on the scene which changed the aspect of affairs. The growing power of Germany had been looming up as a future menace to both Britain and Russia, and it behoved these two Powers to shake hands if the menace were to be met, as it would have to be, by concerted action. Stock had to be taken of rival interests which clashed and an adjustment made to remove causes of friction. One of the most important of these was the Persian question, and the adjustment took the form of the Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907. The details of this agreement are well known, and no more need be said than that by it Russia received a free hand, so far as Britain was concerned, to push her interests in the Northern and the greater part of Central Persia, which was assigned as her sphere, Britain being given a similar free hand in a small corner of South-East Persia which constituted her sphere,

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while the remainder of the country, including the bulk of the Persian Gulf coast, was included in a neutral sphere open to the enterprises of both. That Russia was skilled in driving bargains was well known, but she certainly excelled herself here. Not only was she free from opposition in moulding Northern Persia to suit her aims, but she got the route to the warm waters of the south left comfortably open for her should she need it in the future. And she profited, in an almost equal degree, by what may be termed a by-product of the Agreement. This partition of their country, as they termed it, regardless of their own views on the subject, was bitterly resented by the Persians, and especially by the Constitutionalists, who regarded it as an abandonment of them by their traditional friend to their traditional enemy. The warm friendship for the Power that had been the rival of Russia was turned to a distrust almost as great. The astute Russian had scored all along the line. That the *rapprochement* with Russia was necessary and wise in view of our larger Imperial interests no Briton can well deny, but that the price paid for it in Persia was a heavy one cannot also be gainsaid.

It was in this altered atmosphere of Anglo-Russian relations that the struggle between Mahomed Ali and the Persian parliament, and the events subsequent to that monarch's deposition, took place. Britain has been much criticized, especially by foreigners, for what may be termed standing by and

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looking on while Russia mauled Persia, but having made an agreement with Russia, Britain was bound to abide by its terms in the spirit and the letter. No other course was feasible.

Revolutions and constitutional upheavals are disorganizing things in any country. They are ruinous in a land like Persia, where lawlessness is only kept down at the best of times with difficulty. The reins of government, getting loose in the latter days of Nasir-ud-din and during the reign of Mozuffer-ed-din, had dropped completely out of hand as the result of the struggles between Mahomed Ali and his parliament. The country became a paradise for the highway robber, but for no one else, and in order to protect the lives and property of foreigners in what was now her sphere, Russia had been obliged to send troops into various parts of Northern Persia. Such was the condition of things when the Constitutionalists tried to take up the reins after the deposition of Mahomed Ali. It cannot be denied that they made a serious effort to set their house in order. Swedish officers were engaged to organize a rural *gendarmerie* for the maintenance of order on the high roads, a neutral Power like Sweden being chosen to avoid introducing discordant notes among the greater Powers having local interests. America was asked to send financial experts to reorganize the financial administration of the country. But Russia again stepped in. Just as matters appeared to be brightening a little, an attempt was made by the

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ex-Shah Mahomed Ali, with apparently the connivance of Russia, to regain his throne. The suppression of the attempt was attended by the inevitable outbreaks in different parts of the country and a draining of the Government's already scanty supply of funds. Finally Russia, falling foul of the American Financial Mission, demanded their dismissal by an ultimatum, backed by the dispatch of more troops into Northern Persia. The Persian Parliament, refusing to accept Russia's ultimatum, was dissolved, and a Commission formed to carry out Russia's demands. The attempt at regeneration had, for the time being, completely failed, from causes which it cannot be denied were beyond Persia's control. Resentment at Russia's action led to anti-Russian outbreaks, which were visited in their turn by severe reprisals. One of these, the bombardment of the shrine of Imam Reza at Meshed, a place of peculiar sanctity to Persians, was bitterly resented throughout the country. As one Persian, speaking to me, put it, it was an event that would not be forgotten or forgiven while the Persian language was spoken. The chaos in the south, where there are important British commercial interests, obliged the British Government to send troops from India for their protection, as Russia had done in the north. The Tehran Government, now barely master in its own house, struggled along, endeavouring to maintain some show of authority in the country.

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Such was the condition of Persia when the conflagration of 1914 burst upon the world. The Germans, who had been preparing, with their characteristic thoroughness, for some time for "The Day" in all parts of the world, had, naturally, not neglected Persia. From what has been related above of the pre-war course of events in this country, it will be realized that the soil of Persia was well prepared for the activities of our late enemies. Deeming Russia to be their mortal enemy, sore with Britain for having, as they regarded it, abandoned Persia to that mortal enemy, it is not surprising that a considerable current of sympathy set in towards the Power that was now the enemy of both. The German Legation at Tehran became a hotbed of anti-Ally propaganda and intrigue. Harmless German traders and commercial representatives were transformed into agents of their Government and energetic workers against Allied interests. The activity of these gentry, the pluck displayed by many of them, and their determination and resource in the face of countless dangers, privations and difficulties, cannot but merit a tribute of admiration from us, their enemies. Of those who worked against Allied interests in Persia, the palm must undoubtedly be awarded to the notorious Wassmuss, who was a thorn in our sides practically throughout the war. The history of this gentleman's adventures, if they ever come to be written, will be worthy of a place among the most remarkable romances of this or any

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other age. Robbers, scoundrels, and the cut-throat fraternity generally, had always existed in undesirable plenty in Persia and had needed strong measures to keep them down; they had multiplied like rabbits under the suitable conditions for their increase which existed between the death of Nasir-ud-din Shah and the outbreak of the Great War. Wassmuss appeared amongst these gentry as a veritable angel of darkness and seems to have been readily accepted as a leader by them. He would suddenly appear in some unthought-of locality, carry out a "stunt" and be back among his followers in their mountain fastnesses before any attempt could be made to catch them. He completely closed the Bushire-Shiraz road during a great part of the war. He succeeded in seizing the British Consul and the British colony in Shiraz early in the war and keeping them prisoners among the tribesmen for several months. Had we been prepared to take a leaf out of the Hun book, a suitable reward could certainly have been offered for the gentleman's head and would no doubt have been duly earned; but such methods were, of course, quite repugnant to British ideas. Legitimate methods of capture failed entirely.

On the outbreak of the Great War, Persia issued the usual proclamation of neutrality, but she was of course, powerless to enforce it. Such order as existed in the country was mainly due, in the north, to Russian troops, and, in the south, to a British Indian force, both belligerents. The country was

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being overrun by agents of their enemies, trying to make things as unpleasant for them and for the interests of their respective nations as possible. Had, however, Turkey kept out of the war, conditions in Persia might have been neglected for the time being, so far as the Allies were concerned. But the entry of Turkey into the war put a different aspect on the matter. An open road now lay before the Central Powers into Persia and, what was more important, beyond. The valuable oilfields in the south-west corner of Persia, the preservation of the output from which was important for the British Navy, would be open to attack. But, worse than this, an opportunity was afforded to Germany to apply a screw to the British Empire in a direction where it would be felt. The resources of India in men and material was no inconsiderable asset to the British Empire in the world struggle. If a torch could be applied to the inflammable material in Afghanistan and along the western frontier of India, not only would Indian resources available for elsewhere be pinned down at home, but resources from other parts of the Empire might be needed in India which would otherwise be available against Germany on more important theatres of the struggle. The results promised by striking at Britain, via Persia, were worth some efforts on the part of the Germans, and these efforts were made.

On Turkey entering the war, a British expedition was sent from India to occupy Basra and the outlets

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from Mesopotamia to the Persian Gulf. The primary object of this expedition may be considered to have been the protection of the Persian oilfields, and this object was attained, though it involved an increase of the original force and an advance up the Tigris before the oilfields could be regarded as secure. The other danger involved by Turkey's entrance into the war was a hostile movement across the helpless body of Persia towards the numerous powder barrels on India's western frontier. This did not, at first, assume the serious menace which it did later, when, as a result of the Russian revolution, the Russian forces in Asia Minor melted away and left the road quite open to our enemies. But even while Russian troops were operating against the Turks in Asia Minor via Western and North-Western Persia, small parties of our enemies could, and did, get through into Persia and thence into Afghanistan. These parties, as representatives of the Powers that were fighting the mighty Russian and mighty Briton, were naturally a source of considerable interest, and sympathetic interest, to the people they passed through. The fairy tales they spun, such as the famous one of the Kaiser's conversion to Islam and the war being one to champion and free Mohammedan races, had considerable effect. Further, and a most important factor in the East, they were plentifully provided with Persian money, "made in Germany." I heard that the influx of these German-made Persian coins caused some em-

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barrassment to the Imperial Bank of Persia; but as it was found that the only difference between them and the native-minted money was in the superiority of the silver of which they were composed and in the superiority of the finish with which they were minted, there was no other course but to accept them as genuine. These parties succeeded in doing great damage to Allied, and particularly British, trading and other interests in the country. The activities of Wassmuss have already been alluded to. Another notable success scored by them was in the Kerman district, which they succeeded in completely controlling for a time. But these parties were after bigger game than local successes against British interests in different parts of Persia. Their goal was Afghanistan and the prize an attack by Afghanistan and the turbulent tribes of the north-west frontier on India. A number of parties did get through, and though, thanks to the staunchness of Amir Habibulla and his loyal observance of treaty obligations, they failed in their hoped-for outbreak, they undoubtedly did a lot of mischief and sowed much of the trouble which we reaped in 1919—trouble which fortunately came after, and not during, the Great War. The menace due to the activity of these parties was a serious and real one, and one which, as will be realized from what has been said above, had potentialities of far-reaching results so long as the Great War was in progress. It was very largely held back by a single thread—

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the life of one man, the Amir Habibulla of Afghanistan. And such threads in a country like Afghanistan are apt to be somewhat slender, as after-events have shown. It was a matter, therefore, of necessity to much more than the local interests of Indian defence, that extensive measures should be taken to curb the activities of these parties in Persia and catch them if they tried to cross into Afghanistan.

Decisively successful results to the operations of the Russians in Asia Minor and of the British in Mesopotamia would, of course, have done more than anything else to nip in the bud the evil wrought, and sought to be wrought, by these parties. But such decisive success did not take place, at all events in the first part of the war. The Russo-Turkish battle line swayed backwards and forwards, sometimes well within Persian territory. The British, prior to their final victorious advance on Bagdad, had had a set-back, culminating in the surrender of Kut. And each set-back encouraged the hopes of those trying to stir up trouble in Persia and, through Persia, in Afghanistan. The British Government, in view of the success which had attended the Russians in raising, in the north, a Persian force officered by Russians, determined to try a similar experiment in the south with a view to stabilizing conditions in that region. Sir Percy Sykes, an officer of much Persian experience and great popularity in the country, was selected to raise the new force. The story of the South Persia Rifles has been

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told elsewhere, and in any case would be out of place here. Suffice it to say that, though it had for a time a chequered career, it was, before its final disbandment in 1921, probably the finest military force, composed of Persians, that has ever been seen in that country.

German efforts during the war were persistently directed towards bringing in Persia openly on the side of the Central Powers, but though they went near success on several occasions, they did not succeed in getting a declaration of war against the Allies from Persia. They managed to bring about wholesale desertions to the Turks from the rural *gendarmerie*, for the organization of which, as has been mentioned, Swedish officers had been obtained. Their success in this respect was probably largely due to the pro-German sentiments of the Swedes, a number of whom left the Persian service at this time. The causes which tended to make Persian feelings and sympathies veer so largely to the side of the Germans have already been alluded to. These feelings found expression in an attempt made in the latter part of 1916 on the part of the Parliament (which had been reassembled just before the outbreak of the war) to remove itself from Tehran to Ispahan and take with it the young Shah. At Ispahan, where they would have been farther from the menace of Russian troops, they would have found it easier to throw in their lot openly with Germany. The attempt was frustrated by those who were in charge of Allied interests at the capital,

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and the nominal neutrality of Persia was maintained throughout the war.

It is hoped that from this brief summary of what took place in Persia prior to and on the outbreak of the Great War, the reader will be able to appreciate the conditions which justified, nay, absolutely necessitated, British military intervention in Persia, and particularly in the part with which we are more especially concerned in these pages, the eastern border adjoining Afghanistan. As I put it, in discussing the matter with many of my Persian friends, if you owned a valuable house in a street where a fire was raging and the owner of the neighbouring house was quite unable to stop the conflagration passing through his property to your house, would you not be justified in going into his premises and taking there, yourself, the measures necessary for preventing the conflagration reaching your property? And I could not find any of them, even among those to whom the idea of foreign troops on Persian soil was evidently most distasteful, who were prepared to give me a reply in the negative.

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CHAPTER III

THE EAST PERSIAN CORDON

Prior to the Great War, the manner in which modern arms of precision had been getting into the hands of the lawless tribes who inhabit the regions adjoining the north-west frontier of India, had been a source of increasing anxiety to the Indian Government. The increased difficulty of dealing with hostile tribesmen, as a result of the latter having long-range rifles, instead of old-fashioned weapons throwing a ball but a hundred yards or so, had come very forcibly to notice in the operations needed to quell the frontier risings of 1897. In mountain warfare, columns of troops or convoys, marching along the valleys where the route usually lies, have to be protected from snipers or bodies of the enemy, hidden among the hills overlooking the route. This is effected by placing piquets, or small detachments, on hills adjoining the route from which all ground capable of affording shelter to the enemy can be overlooked. It will be readily understood how much more difficult it becomes to do this when all ground within 2,000 yards of the route has to be commanded in this manner, instead of that only

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within 200 yards, all that was necessary formerly. As a result of the experiences of 1897, stringent measures were taken in India to prevent leakage of arms and ammunition to the frontier by theft from troops and arsenals. Those who have soldiered in recent times in India, especially near the north-west frontier, know how large a part the circumventing of that most astute of all individuals, the frontier rifle thief, plays in the daily routine of one's duties.

But that demand creates supply is one of Nature's laws, and Nature will not be gainsaid. Close one source of supply and, if the demand is sufficiently insistent, other sources of supply will appear and force themselves, through any difficulties, to the locality where the demand attracts them. So it was with the tribesmen's demand for modern rifles. In life such as it is among the frontier tribesmen, the man with the best gun is top dog of the particular spot he dwells in. Quite apart, therefore, from its utility for purposes of raiding into British India, the possession of a good rifle is a matter of life and death to a man whose home is in these regions. He will pay any money he can scrape together, any fancy price, to have a weapon that will be one better than that of his neighbours. And fancy prices will attract fancy efforts to bring in the commodity demanded. Precautions against thieving in India having cut off one source of supply, the output from the factory at Kabul being strictly watched by the Amir in his own interests, and local manufac-

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turing efforts being capable of only producing a third-class article that would not fetch fancy prices, the weapon suppliers had to seek for new sources of supply. A thriving trade began to spring up between rifle factories in Europe and places on the coast of Arabia, particularly Muscat. From here the weapons were carried in native dhows to the Persian coast opposite, where caravans were waiting to convey them across South-East Persia and Baluchistan, through Afghanistan, to the tribesmen on the western frontier of India. This trade appears to have grown quietly and assumed some dimensions before being discovered. The first signs were the increasing numbers of effective weapons that were obviously in the hands of the tribesmen. Much skill and power of organization had evidently been displayed in creating this trade, and there can be little doubt that some brains were employed in it that should have shunned so nefarious a traffic. When it was discovered, steps had to be taken to counter it. The most effective way would have been to stop the stream of arms and ammunition coming from Europe to the Arabian coast. But here various international interests came into play, and though it was eventually brought about, it was only after much delay and delicate negotiations had taken place. But though it was a delicate matter to stop the flow of arms from Europe to the Arabian coast, there was no need for delicacy as regards preventing their passage across the Persian Gulf or

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attempting to intercept caravans between the Gulf and the Afghan frontier. Naval operations were undertaken to search dhows crossing the Gulf from the Arabian to the Persian shore. A detachment of troops was sent from Quetta to what was, up till then, the "back of beyond," the region where Persia, Afghanistan and Baluchistan meet in the hill known as "Kuh-i-Malik Siah." The object of these troops was to round up caravans carrying arms and ammunition that had managed to slip through the naval net drawn across the Persian Gulf. These arrangements had been put into force some time prior to 1914, and were in full swing when the war broke out. It was the little detachment sent originally to Robat, near Kuh-i-Malik Siah, to capture gun-runners' caravans, that grew later into the much larger force in East Persia, seeking larger game.

The southern frontier of Afghanistan runs in a more or less straight line from Kuh-i-Malik Siah eastwards to a point west of Quetta, where it turns northwards along the ranges defining the western border of India. On the other side the Afghan frontier with Persia turns sharply to the north at Kuh-i-Malik Siah, and follows a general northward trend till it meets the Russian frontier east of Meshed. The south-west part of Afghanistan is, therefore, rectangular in form, having at its corner the fertile oasis of Seistan, which it divides with Persia. At the other end of Afghanistan's southern

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border lies a block of high ground, the Quetta district of British Baluchistan. The Afghan border lies along the northern foothills of this block. This high ground extends westwards from Quetta for about 100 miles, where in the neighbourhood of Nushki it drops abruptly to a sandy waterless waste, which is the prevailing feature on both sides of the Balucho-Afghan frontier over the 300 miles that lie between Nushki and Robat. South of this desert waste, and between it and the shores of the Persian Gulf, lies a mass of low broken hills, having but a scanty supply of water and sustaining a sparse population of primitive lawless folk. In only a few places, and notably about the double peaked volcano of the Kuh-i-Taftan, 13,000 feet high, do these hills rise to more than inconsiderable elevations. Round the western side of the frontier desert mentioned above, these southern broken hills curl up to the neighbourhood of Robat and Kuh-i-Malik Siah, meeting similar hills in that region which come down from the East Persian highlands.

Along this inhospitable frontier desert region the detachment sent to waylay gun-runners had to march, through it all supplies for them had to be painfully carried, and it was among the bleak waterless hills of this region that they had to try and circumvent the intrepid carriers of contraband arms. That a desert route of any sort existed or was used at all between Nushki and Robat was due to the existence of the fertile oasis of Seistan at its farther

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end. The Perso-Afghan disputes regarding this region and the appointment of a British Commission to settle them and delimit the frontier had brought the place prominently to notice. British and Russian Consulates were established there. Russian trade from the north was attracted to it. The British occupation of Quetta and the construction of a railway from India to Quetta had opened up the possibilities of Seistan to traders from India—possibilities which were much increased by the extension of the railway from Quetta to Nushki. The route to Seistan, via Nuski and Robat, round the south side of the Afghan rectangle, was used in preference to the equally desert but more direct and shorter route across Afghan territory, as the trader thereby avoided Afghan transit dues and other obstacles. Before the dispatch of the military detachment to Robat a well-defined but badly watered and badly supplied caravan route had therefore already been established across the desert from Nushki to Robat. But a route that is feasible for slow-moving trade caravans, with small internal requirements, becomes a different proposition when it has to be used for supplying a military force, however small, that has to carry out difficult operations at the far end of it. From the first, therefore, the supply of the Robat detachment was a great difficulty. Little or nothing could be obtained locally, convoys took long periods to do the round journey to Robat, and the wastage of camels on the scantily supplied and scantily

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watered route was serious. What had been a difficult matter from the first became ten times more so when the events related in the last chapter led to an increase in the strength of the Robat detachment, and the duty of hunting for and capturing hostile emissaries and parties proceeding to and from Afghanistan was added to its previous function of stopping gun-runners.

When the mischief likely to be wrought by these enemy individuals and parties was realized, steps were taken to spread a net along the Perso-Afghan and Balucho-Afghan frontiers for them. Besides increasing the Robat detachment, parties from it were pushed up into Seistan, and later to Birjand. At the same time arrangements were made with our Russian allies for them to spread a net downwards from the north to meet ours at Birjand. And so grew what came to be known as the "East Persian Cordon."

The exciting game of hunt the slipper in these regions now began. And the odds were greatly in favour of the slipper. The Persian side of what has been called above the "Afghan rectangle" from Kuh-i-Malik Siah to the Russian frontier is 500 miles as the crow flies, mostly a rugged hilly country affording endless hiding-places. Here, and still more so in the hilly region south of the Balucho-Afghan frontier desert, were to be found numbers of lawless folk, only too ready to hide and assist parties who, like themselves, were "agin the government." The

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gun-runners, too, as can be imagined, made common cause with these hostile emissaries and parties, and their intimate knowledge of the country and of hiding-places must have been of great value to the latter.

In order to catch these people it was necessary first to get information of their existence and whereabouts and then try to draw a net round them. But by the time news arrived of a party of them, they were probably elsewhere, and by the time patrols were set in motion after them, they were most likely over the Afghan border. Even a line held as densely as an ordinary outpost line would not have been proof against individuals, especially in disguise as these were, getting through, and to watch closely a line several hundred miles long was, of course, out of the question. Reliance had to be placed mainly on as good an intelligence service as could be organized in order to get speedy news, and backing this up by a series of small lightly equipped patrols ready to go off, at any hour of the day or night, on news being brought in. Such patrols would naturally be most effective if composed of horsemen, but horses cannot do strenuous work without water and forage. And it was in these two commodities that the hilly region where the hunting had to be done was particularly lacking. An experiment was tried of mounting part of a cavalry regiment on camels for this work, but the camel is a peculiar beast and seems to resent being tended by anyone who has not been

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born and bred alongside a camel. The experiment was not altogether a success. Bodies of levies were raised by the Consular authorities in East Persia to assist in the hunt. Being composed of local men, acquainted with the country, they were of great value. The full story of these exciting chases after the Hun and his allies in East Persia can only be told properly by one who took a personal part in them. Suffice it to say that, notwithstanding the difficulties that had to be contended with and the odds against them, our troops did succeed in rounding up quite a fair bag. One of the smartest captures effected was that of two Germans and a large part of a gun-running caravan, after a skilful stalk, at Dehsalm, on the borders of the Qainat highlands and the Central Persian Desert, by a detachment of the 28th Light Cavalry. Some captures were also effected of individuals returning from their trips to Afghanistan, and the documents found on them were of some value, especially in demonstrating what these gentry were playing at. A document captured on one of these men was destined to furnish a remarkable example of the extraordinary skill which is attained by those who make a hobby of the decipherment of unknown ciphers. This particular document was in German cipher, and though the cipher expert in question was unacquainted with the German language he succeeded in decoding the message sufficiently well into clear German to be comprehensible.

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The increase in the number of troops at and beyond Robat, and the more extended duties they had to undertake, naturally led to a considerable increase in the number of convoys that were on the move between Nushki and Robat, and the good plunder that was streaming along this line attracted the attention of the lawless tribes that have been mentioned as inhabiting the hilly tracts south of the frontier desert area. Attacks and looting of convoys became more and more frequent. Steps had to be taken to meet this evil, and Brig.-General R. E. Dyer was appointed to take charge of and organize the defence of this line. What happened has been graphically told by General Dyer himself in his book, *The Raiders of the Sarhad.* The energetic measures taken by General Dyer and continued by his successor, General Tanner, were successful in getting rid of this source of trouble. The head-quarters of the raiding tribes at Khwash were occupied by our troops, and a post built which not only overawed the tribes but was a means of collecting supplies from one of the few spots where there were any to be had, in this region.

But another trouble now loomed larger every day and threatened in an even greater degree than the raids of the Sarhadis to paralyse the efforts of the troops on the East Persian Cordon. Napoleon is reported to have said that the best frontier a country can have is a desert, and the truth of this saying was well exemplified by what occurred in this region.

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Most of us are familiar with the fable, so sedulously taught us in the animal picture-books of our childhood days, that the camel is a beast that can go for long periods without food or drink, as he carries in his hump an almost inexhaustible supply of these necessaries of life. The experience of those who served in East Persia certainly did not bear out the teachings of their childhood days in this respect. It is true that the camel will readily lap up liquid doing duty for water that the horse or mule would turn up his nose at. He will also devour with relish the most appallingly thorny scrub, things that the more noble beasts would hesitate in putting their feet near, much less take into their mouths. But to suppose that the camel can dispense with even this inferior form of nutriment is a very great fallacy. The desert route between Nushki and Robat at the best of times was but scantily provided with mud-pools and thorn-scrub. Under the increased camel traffic necessitated by the presence of troops on the East Persian Cordon, they grew beautifully less. The camel transport, insufficiently nourished, began to die off at an appalling rate. When I went to the country later, the old route to Robat was literally marked out in places with camel skeletons every hundred yards or so. I believe I am correct in saying that at one time the monthly camel casualties ran well into four figures. Such a drain on the camel resources of India was a thing that could not be permitted to continue. Throughout the Great War

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the menace of trouble on the western frontier of India was always present, and sufficient transport to meet such an eventuality had to be kept in hand. At times this reserve was cut down to very low margins to meet calls from the theatres of war dependent on India. The depletion due to East Persia had to be stopped.

It was in these circumstances that it was decided to extend the Quetta–Nushki railway westwards across this desert area. That there was some hesitation and heart-searchings before this decision was arrived at can well be understood. The value of this desert region as an obstacle to military operations had been strikingly demonstrated as against ourselves; we were about to do away with this best of defensive frontiers against others by bridging it with a railway. And it must be remembered that a railway, once constructed, is there permanently, it is practically indestructible. This is a point that is frequently lost sight of. Before the war the question of linking up the Indian and European railway systems through Persia had periodically come up for discussion. It was the fashion of the commercial interests that were pushing the idea to belittle military objections by saying that you had only to blow up the bridges and pull up rails here and there and you were no worse off than if the railway had never been built. Now, the important part of a railway from the point of view of its destructibility is the formation level. The thing

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that takes time in building a new line is the selection and marking out of the route and the enormous amount of earthwork that has to be done, banking up here and cutting out there. And this once done, cannot be "blown up." There are few railway bridges which, if blown up, cannot be patched or a diversion made, capable of passing traffic, within two days. Replacing torn-up track can be effected even more rapidly. Damage, involving temporary delay to the enemy and *tactical* results, can certainly be easily done to a railway; to put it completely out of action for military purposes *strategically* would need a giant some 5,000 feet high armed with an iron rake of proportionate dimensions.

The decision to extend the railway had, therefore, to be made with the full knowledge that we should be bridging this desert, inconvenient now, but potentially valuable in different circumstances, for all time. But the extension was inevitable. Matters were not looking too bright on the Asia Minor front, and it was imperative to keep those who were carrying torches away from the loose powder along the Indian frontier. As Russia was now an ally, it was hoped that the memory of our comradeship during the Great War would preclude the possibility of her becoming anything but a healthy trade rival for many a decade. And so the railway was extended. The first extension was to Dalbandin, 120 miles from Nushki, and afforded a great relief to the supply difficulties of the East Persian Cordon;

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but the worst of the desert lay beyond, and it was continued to Mirjawa, on the Perso-Baluch frontier, and finally to Duzdab, 36 miles south of Kuh-i-Malik Siah, the further projected extension to Neh being cancelled when the Armistice brought the Great War to an end.

The pumping machinery and other appliances which the railway was the means of bringing to the spot enabled sources of water to be found and tapped in a way not previously possible. Dalbandin began to grow quite green. But water was still the difficulty beyond, and had to be carried in special tank trucks for engines running west of Dalbandin. Another difficulty which this favoured region of the earth provided for the railway at certain seasons of the year was the "creeping sandhill." Huge mounds of earth, of a crescent shape, move forward impelled by wind and possibly other satanic influences at large, and in the course of a night will completely envelop anything so insignificant as a railway, involving a lot of labour before the mass is shifted and sped onward on its journey after further objects to seize in its octopus-like grasp. We experienced trouble from these creeping sandhills in other places, and particularly on the desert strip mentioned in Chapter I as separating the Qainat from the Khorasan blocks of highlands. To prevent the road in that locality from being engulfed by these moving masses, various expedients were tried, but none with complete success. Planting two or more parallel rows

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of desert scrub in the form of hedges on the windward side of the road was advantageous in that it gave the travelling nuisance something to play with and arrested its journey for a bit. Warning was thus obtained in time to get gangs out and to deal with the obstruction before it had succeeded in blocking the road for traffic. Digging through the middle of a heap seen to be approaching was also found useful. It seemed to take the heart out of the monster, and sometimes caused it to dissipate instead of travelling in a united mass.

While the railway was pushing its way across the Nushki desert, and camel convoys were laboriously carrying supplies, under the difficulties described, to our troops, who in conjunction with the Russians farther north, were drawing a net across East Persia, events occurred farther west which necessitated preparations being set on foot in East Persia to meet more serious eventualities than the passage of hostile emissaries and firebrands, and which will form the subject of the next chapter.

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CHAPTER IV

DEVELOPMENT OF THE EAST PERSIAN CORDON INTO THE EAST PERSIAN LINE OF COMMUNICATIONS

As the year 1916 drew to a close, Fortune seemed to be smiling on the Allied cause in Asia Minor. The Russians, after several set-backs, appeared to be definitely gaining the upper hand over the Turks. Erzeroum had fallen into their hands. The British in Mesopotamia, after the reverse of Kut in the previous spring, had recovered, been reinforced, and were starting the forward move that was to carry them victoriously to Bagdad. It looked as if a victorious Anglo-Russian sweep across Asia Minor, knocking out the Turk, was about to herald the hoped-for downfall of the Central Powers. But Fate had decreed otherwise. Early in 1917 the world was startled by an announcement that the Tsar had abdicated in favour of his brother, who had, however, not occupied the vacant throne, and that a revolutionary government had assumed power in Russia. We were assured, however, that the new government was loyal to the Alliance, that it would prosecute the war against Germany with greater zeal than

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the late one had done, and that, in fact, one of the causes which had brought about the revolution was the fear that some of the ex-Tsar's entourage had been inclined to dabble with the peace-with-Germany idea. But there was no getting over the fact that while crossing a stream is a bad time for swapping horses, and there were a good many of us who looked upon the news as the worst we had heard since the commencement of the war. And so it proved to be, particularly in the Middle East.

Discipline in the old Russian army was not what we understand by the term in the British service. With us the officer is not only the leader, he is the comrade of his men, and so may it always be. This relationship, which can best be likened to that of a captain towards the members of his football team, had no counterpart in the Russian service. There the officer was the tyrant, the dealer-out of punishments, and discipline was almost synonymous with fear. British officers who had seen something of Russian troops could not but be struck by the manner of officers in their dealings with their men. An army resting on such foundations was unable to withstand the disintegrating effect of an event like the Russian revolution. Officers were murdered, and the men, with the exception of a very small remnant who clung with tenacious fidelity to such officers as were left, melted away. The army which had thrust the Turks back west of Erzeroum vanished

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like smoke, and the Caucasus and the western frontier of Persia were left free to Turkish inroads. Fortunately at this time the victorious advance of the British in Mesopotamia to Bagdad and beyond was taking place. This thrust engaged the attention of the Turks, and the Central Powers were unable to take immediate advantage of the free road into Persia now open to them. But the possibilities of this free road were not lost sight of by the directing brains at Berlin, and there was speedily a visible increase in the enemy efforts, directed, as before, on Afghanistan, via Persia. Simultaneously with the collapse of the Russian force on the western border of Persia, the Russian part of the East Persian Cordon, from Birjand to the north, melted away in a similar manner, officers being murdered here as elsewhere. If the Cordon was to be maintained, and the need for it was now greater than ever, there was no alternative but to extend the British part of it northwards to Meshed and to the Russian frontier beyond, to cover the ground formerly held by the Russian part of the net. This was done, the troops on the Cordon being proportionately reinforced. But the difficulties of getting supplies and stores to the Cordon, bad enough when the extreme end was at Birjand, 300 miles from Robat, became monumental when the point had to be pushed another 300 miles and more beyond that again. Still, the thing had to be done, and with characteristic British energy was done. But the difficulties and hardships

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undergone by the troops can hardly be realized by those who did not take part in these operations. Months had to elapse before stores, medicines, etc., some perhaps urgently needed, could reach their destination. Fortunately the Russians, in their precipitate dissolution, had left behind them some things, including much-needed hospital materials, that were useful. Once also Khorasan was reached the troops were in a country where at all events food for themselves and their animals was procurable, and could be utilized not only for themselves but to be sent back on empty returning transport to the more barren regions in the centre of the Cordon. And so they carried on.

But events in Russia now took a further turn for the worse from the Allied point of view. The idealists in Russia who had initiated the revolution had started a rock moving down-hill, and as generally happens when idealists start a ball rolling, they were very soon unable to control its pace or its direction. The control got entirely into the hands of the extremists, who repudiated any allegiance to the Allied cause and who entered into negotiations with the Germans. It was by no means beyond the bounds of possibility that our former allies might before long be ranged on the side of our enemies. In the beginning of 1918 the clouds looked very black for the Allied cause. Though, as it turned out, it was but the darkest hour which proverbially precedes the dawn, few could have diagnosed it as

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such, none could have neglected the precautions and measures which the darkness of the situation demanded.

And the situation in the part of the world with which we are dealing certainly looked very dark indeed. In Western Persia the gaps left by the disappearance of the Russians had been filled by advancing Turks, who had also occupied the greater part of the Caucasus. The Russian extremists, with their scarcely veiled hostility to the Allies, were in control of the greater part of European and Asiatic Russia. In a few parts of the country, it is true, those who either favoured the old régime or had been disgusted with the excesses of the Bolsheviks were holding out against them. This was notably the case in Southern Russia, Siberia, Transcaspia, and the Cossack regions north of the Caspian.

Persia herself was, as before, unable to do anything one way or the other. Her nominal neutrality was tinged with different colours according to the particular sympathies of the various cabinets which succeeded each other with kaleidoscopic rapidity during this period. Everything pointed to a probable Turco-German sweep across Northern Persia towards the powder barrels in Afghanistan. The arrival of a hostile force in the latter country would be the signal for a general uprising which the Amir, however well intentioned, would probably be powerless to prevent, and the conflagration would be a

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general one all along the frontier. It was necessary to stop the hostile wave before it reached Afghanistan and as far as possible from the Indian frontier.

An effort had to be made, in the first place, to do something to stem the wave in Western or North-western Persia. But to send a force of any size from Mesopotamia into North-western Persia would, at this time, have been a very risky proceeding. A long line of communications from Mesopotamia would be involved, over difficult country, liable to be completely blocked by snow in winter. And worse than this the line of communications would be, so to speak, broadside on to the enemy, liable to be easily raided or cut. A force dependent on such a line is always in danger. Instead, therefore, of sending a British force to oppose the hostile advance directly, it was decided to attempt to utilize the latent anti-Turk feelings of the inhabitants of North-western Persia and the Caucasus, sending British officers to rouse and organize the resistance of the people against the Turks. These people had suffered much from the Turks in the past, and it was reasonable to hope that they would be glad enough to avail themselves of assistance in preventing themselves being once again engulfed by those from whose oppression they had already suffered. Hence came into being that " hush-hush " force, officially known as " Dunsterforce," of whose doings we have heard from the pen of its commander, Major-General

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Dunsterville, in his book *The Adventures of Dunsterforce*, and to which the reader can be referred for details of a most thrilling episode in the history of the Great War. Suffice it here to say that though this adventurous band of Britons accomplished much, the martial ardour of the inhabitants they went to assist did not come up to expectations. Though Dunsterforce made its way to Baku on the Caspian, and some troops were sent from Mesopotamia to it as a stiffening, it was not possible to hold on there, and a retirement had to be effected to Northern Persia. Its situation thereafter became one of some anxiety—anxiety that was not relieved till Allenby's successful operations in Palestine brought about the collapse of the Turks in the different theatres of the war.

While preparations were being made for a first line of resistance in North-western Persia by means of Dunsterforce, other preparations were set on foot to meet the anticipated hostile wave in East Persia, should it prove too much for Dunsterforce to check in the west. A military mission, under Major-General (now Sir Wilfrid) Malleson, an officer of great experience and a recognized expert in intelligence matters, was sent to Meshed. General Malleson speedily established a wonderful intelligence organization there, and it is not too much to say that nothing of importance went on in Western Afghanistan, Transcaspia, or Russian Central Asia, without his being speedily made acquainted with

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it. He also raised levies from the local inhabitants, organized the loyal Russian refugees who had fled into Persia from Bolshevik tyranny, and entered into negotiations with the anti-Bolshevik government of Transcaspia which had been established at Askhabad. The latter agreed to use all their resources against enemy attempts in this region in return for our assistance to them in their struggle with the Bolsheviks of Tashkent and Central Asia. The collapse of Germany and the end of the Great War lifted the menace, to meet which these preparations had been made. The value of the work done by General Malleson and his mission was therefore, to a great extent, lost sight of, but it would have been very much in the limelight had the war not ended when it did and had the Turco-German wave, rolling eastward, matured.

It has been mentioned that on the disappearance of the Russians from the northern part of the East Persian Cordon, their place was filled by extending the British half of the Cordon northwards from Birjand. British detachments were now pushed forward from the Cordon to the Russian railway in Transcaspia to assist the Askhabad Russians in keeping off the Bolsheviks who were attacking them from Tashkent, along the railway. This was in accordance with the pact made with the Askhabad government referred to above. But independently of this pact, it was necessary in order to check the inroad of Germans and Austrians who were coming

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in some numbers from Siberia, and to prevent their joining their mischief-making compatriots already in Persia and Afghanistan. During the early part of the war a number of prisoners taken by the Russian forces in Europe had been sent for safe custody to Siberia. On the advent to power of the Bolsheviks these prisoners were released. They began to move westwards in hopes of regaining their homes. A portion of the railway between Siberia and European Russia was, however, still in the hands of the loyal Orenburg Cossacks, and a direct return by rail was not possible for these prisoners. A good many were armed and reformed into units and fought for the Bolshevik cause, contributing in no small degree to Bolshevik successes in Asia. Others tried to get home by circuitous routes, such as via Afghanistan and Persia, where they got roped in by their compatriots to assist in the game the latter were playing.

Our detachments which were pushed into and fought in Transcaspia worthily upheld the name of the British and Indian armies and of the regiments, the 28th Light Cavalry and 19th Punjabis, from which they were chiefly furnished. Fighting successfully always against superior numbers, they instilled a wholesome feeling of respect for them in their opponents. One incident is worthy of being related in detail here. A patrol of the 28th Light Cavalry, about twenty of all ranks, were sighted from afar by a body of some 150 of the hostile horsemen.

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The latter lay in wait, rejoicing in their good fortune and looking forward to an easy mopping up of the small patrol. When they emerged to fall on the patrol, the latter, to their astonishment, at once charged into the middle of them. Completely taken aback by the suddenness of the unexpected onslaught, the "Bolshi" horsemen broke and fled, and only succeeded in escaping with the loss of an appreciable percentage of their numbers. During the Great War there were so many isolated deeds of heroism that incidents such as this one escaped the notice they would have received in pre-war times. This incident deserves mention, however, not only as one that the 28th Cavalry and the Indian Army have just reason to be proud of, but as being a striking illustration of the value of an unhesitating and determined offensive, even against considerable odds, which is so assiduously preached in our training manuals. It was said that the "Bolshi" horsemen were careful, after this incident, to give the 28th a wide berth, which can well be believed. The assistance which the Askhabad-Russian cause received from the co-operation of detachments, composed of men of the calibre of the 28th patrol, can well be understood, and it is not too much to say that but for such assistance the Askhabad government would speedily have crumbled away before the Bolshevik onslaught from Central Asia, as in fact it did when, later on, the British force was withdrawn to Persian territory. As it was, the Bolsheviks were driven

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back to beyond the Merv oasis, which was occupied by a mixed British-Indian and Askhabad-Russian force. The Bolsheviks could easily have been driven farther back, but it was not thought advisable to advance our troops farther than Bahram Ali, the next station eastward of Merv, the occupation of which gave us control of the Merv oasis and denied its supplies to the other side. An advance to the Oxus and occupation of the only bridge over that obstacle at Charjui would have been much more effective in keeping the Bolsheviks out of the Transcaspian province and farther from Persia and Afghanistan, but the advantages were evidently not considered sufficient to justify the risk of pushing our detachments so much farther afield.

It has been related above that General Dunsterville's force, which had succeeded in reaching Baku, had been obliged to evacuate it, the Turks threatening the place in very superior force, and the inhabitants displaying no martial spirit and not rendering the assistance that had been expected of them. The Caspian was, however, in friendly hands, for a British naval contingent, under Commodore Norris, had taken charge of the ships of the Russian Imperial Navy, and on behalf of General Denikin's anti-Bolshevik government held command of the Caspian Sea. The troops of Dunsterforce were, therefore, able to move where they wanted on the Caspian, and while the bulk of them retired to Northern

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A Gorge near Robat.

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Persia, a battalion of the Hampshire Regiment and a battery crossed over to Krasnovodsk, the terminus of the Transcaspian railway on the eastern shore of the Caspian. From here they reinforced the troops which had come up from the East Persian Cordon and were fighting the Bolsheviks on the Transcaspian railway. This reinforcement was most welcome to the sometimes hard-pressed British-Indian force, but it added in no small degree to the supply difficulties of the East Persian Cordon.

The head of the railway which was being extended westwards from Nushki was still more than 100 miles from Robat; Robat to Meshed was 600 miles, and Meshed to Askhabad 170 miles. From Askhabad to the fighting front the Russian Transcaspian railway was, of course, available. For the troops opposing the Bolsheviks therefore, though bread, meat, grain and fodder were procurable locally, or from Khorasan, all clothing, ammunition, hospital stores, and the numerous etcetera essential to the troops engaged in active operations, had to be carried 870 miles by road through East Persia from the nearest point of the British Indian railway. The greater part of the road was but a camel-track, often a very poor one at that. The difficulties of water and grazing at the Baluchistan end of the line have already been alluded to. On paper and in cold blood the whole proposition would have been pronounced an impossible one, but like many other

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apparently impossible things during the war, it was managed somehow.

To meet the threatened Turco-German wave across Northern Persia, two sets of preparations, as mentioned above, had been taken in hand. In Western Persia a first line of resistance had been organized in the shape of Dunsterforce. In North-east Persia a military mission, under General Malleson, had been sent to organize intelligence and local resources in preparation for a force of considerable size which it was contemplated to send into this region to deal with the Turco-German wave, should this mature. But more than this had to be done, and done without delay. Before there could be any question of sending into North-east Persia anything more than the small force already there, extensive preparations would be needed on the East Persian Cordon to enable it to perform the functions of supplying and maintaining a large force. The matter was one of great urgency, for the Turco-Germans were already masters of the Caucasus and were pouring into North-west Persia. Though the central part of Persia is a desert, there is a green belt across Northern Persia, along which the march of a military force was a feasibility. In order to make the preparations needed, it was decided that the East Persian Cordon was to be reorganized as a regular line of communications, under an Inspector-General, in accordance with the system laid down in our regulations. The defence of the line, including

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measures for the interception of hostile agents, was, also in accordance with our regulations, to be the function of a separate General Officer Commanding Line of Communication Defences. The troops which were at this period at and to the north of Meshed, were to be placed under a special commander, under the control of General Malleson, and regarded as the instrument by which the latter would give effect to the policy which he was instructed to carry out in this region. The whole line of communications from Quetta to Meshed was placed under the General Officer Commanding the Quetta Division, but he administered directly himself only the railway portion from Quetta to railhead. The road portion from railhead to Meshed was managed by the I.G.C. and G.O.C.L. of C. Defences in East Persia, both responsible to the G.O.C. at Quetta. General Malleson's mission and the force under him reported direct to Army Head-quarters in India. Orders were given for the railway beyond Nushki to be pushed on with all speed, and the line was surveyed for an extension to Neh at the beginning of the Qainat highlands, a point which would have completely left behind it the desert country that had proved so disastrous to our animal convoys.

Brig.-General G. A. Dale, who at this time was commanding the East Persian Cordon, was appointed G.O.C. Line of Communications Defences under the new organization, while I was appointed Inspector-General of Communications. I was at the time

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Inspector of Engineers and Pioneers in India, and left Simla at short notice with instructions to push on the work of organizing the line with all speed, as it was not known how soon the eventuality would mature against which these preparations were being made.

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CHAPTER V

DEPARTURE FOR EAST PERSIA. THE SOUTHERN HALF OF THE LINE, JUZAKH TO BIRJAND

I had just returned to Simla from a tour of inspection to Quetta in connection with my duties as Inspector of Engineers and Pioneers, when I was summoned by Lieut.-General Sir G. Kirkpatrick, the Chief of the General Staff. The situation was explained to me: I was informed that I had been selected to undertake the organization of a line of communications in East Persia, and was directed to start without delay. I had served for some time on the General Staff in India under Sir G. Kirkpatrick, and shared to the full the admiration felt by all of us on the General Staff for the wonderful brain-power of our chief. The kindly advice which he gave me so fully and freely when handing me my instructions was therefore as welcome as it was valuable.

Having received my instructions, my first step was to do a tour of the various branches of Army Head-quarters in order to see what could be obtained in the way of officers, transport and stores for the

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somewhat formidable undertaking that lay before me. The result was to make clear what I had suspected, viz. that there would be a large amount of brickmaking without straw to be done. As I went round the different offices all I seemed able to obtain was a series of solemn homilies on the necessity of husbanding to the utmost limit every form of military resource already in East Persia, both personnel and materiel. The necessity for all that I asked for was admitted, but it was impossible, I was told, to supply them. India, I was informed, had been largely drained, and there was no sign that the drain would not continue, to meet the needs of important theatres of the war. The husbanding of animal transport was specially urged. All this was from the "Administrative" side of Army Headquarters. From the "General Staff" side, the importance of the greatest possible speed in carrying out my task was impressed on me. It was not known how soon the situation might not develop or the necessity arise for sending a large force into North-east Persia, and whenever that eventuality arose it was expected that I should have everything ready for it. Further, it was hinted that medical and sanitary arrangements would need special attention and foresight, as the Indian Government had had a good deal of trouble over the medical difficulties that had arisen in Mesopotamia and did not want to have a repetition of the experience. In fact, I was expected to make the brick, and a jolly good

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brick too, regardless of the absence of the straw, and I hope I shouldered my task with the same cheerfulness which the many soldiers who have had to do the same thing before me have done.

There was a certain German military writer who said that if, in war, you want to attain the possible, it is necessary to attempt the impossible. This appears to be a traditional guiding principle with the British nation in conducting its military enterprises in different parts of the world. And, no doubt, there is a great deal of soundness in it, especially from the economy point of view. Attempt the job in the first instance with the minimum of materials. If it comes off, so much the better. If it does not, the additional materials needed can be supplied later. How many military expeditions of the British Empire have there not been during the last hundred years which can be made to fit into the following framework? First, dispatch of an expedition with inadequate force or materials. A set-back or disaster. Presentation of a "hat, bowler, civilian,"[1] to the General in command. Hurried reinforcements and dispatch of ample materials with a new General. A brilliant victory. Accord of a triumph to the

[1] For the benefit of the non-military reader it must be explained that in military phraseology qualifying adjectives are placed after, and not before, the word they qualify. Thus, if you applied to the Army Ordnance Department for a "horse chestnut," you would get, not the fruit, but an animal of a reddish colour. If you wanted the fruit, you would have to ask for a "nut, chest, horse."

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new General and loud cheers. Military history, and especially British military history, had always been to me a fascinating study, and there appeared, as I studied my task, to be every possibility of history repeating itself once again. But British soldiers regard it as part of their trade to attempt the impossible, and they do it cheerfully, and it is possibly due in a measure to this that the British Empire owes its present position in the world.

As I sped towards Quetta in the sweltering heat of a summer railway journey through the Southern Punjab and studied the papers and contemplated the task that lay before me, the impossibility part of it seemed to loom very large. I had endeavoured before leaving Simla to secure the services of several officers of whose value in tackling impossibilities I had some knowledge, but without success. This class of individual soon becomes known and is naturally much in request in war-time. I had, however, obtained sanction to taking with me, as one of the Administrative Commandants allotted to me, Captain W. J. Good, who had acted as my Staff Officer during my appointment as Inspector of Engineers and Pioneers. Good, before the war, was a member of the Calcutta Port Commission and had had much experience of a nature that would be particularly valuable on a Line of Communications. He was, in addition, an Irishman with a full measure of the qualities and characteristics of that nation. This, combined with his Calcutta Port experience,

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made him invaluable as Administrative Commandant of the base section, that tricky point where rail transport ceases and road movements begin. One of the constant anxieties of an I.G.C. who has to husband his transport to the utmost is overloading. Every one, from highest to lowest, will try and put more on to animals and vehicles than they ought to. And this is worst at the point where rail changes to road transport. It is so easy to stuff extras into railway carriages or vans, but to do so on road transport means breakdowns. I was able to be at ease on this point while Good held the reins at the base. Prevention is proverbially better than cure, and Good's fame having spread Quetta-wards prevented a good deal of unnecessary stuff being brought into East Persia. Like all Irishmen he had a large store of wit, which no doubt helped to soften the iron hand with which he rightly ruled the base. Echoes of it floated up the line. On one occasion he was reported to have expressed a pious wish that the devil might sweep up hell with a certain offender and burn the broom afterwards.

In company with Good, discussing the various problems that lay before us, the fifty-six hours' railway journey between Simla and Quetta soon sped, including a night over the "Sind desert" of evil fame. At Quetta I was joined by Captain Christison, of the 23rd Sikh Pioneers, who had been appointed my Staff Captain. A Scotsman who had been through the ranks in the Artillery, he had gone

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to Australia and served in Gallipoli with the Australians, where he obtained a commission, and then transferred to the Indian army. He was thus an officer of much varied experience. He knew Thomas Atkins from A to Z, and was invaluable when, later on, he had charge of the hottest section of the line, with head-quarters at Hurmukh, and kept the British personnel fit and cheery under very trying conditions.

It was mentioned in the last chapter that, under the new organization to be inaugurated, the control of the East Persia Line of Communications had been placed under the General Officer Commanding the Quetta Division, Lieut.-General Sir R. Wapshare. It has been my good fortune, in the course of my service, to have served under many fine soldiers, to whose example and precept I owe so much, but to none of the chiefs whom it has been my privilege to serve under do I owe so deep a debt of gratitude as I do to General Wapshare. A man of wide experience himself and a knowledge of what pioneering in a new country means, one who has had his own share of brickmaking without straw, to his sympathetic counsel and his unfailing support, is due whatever success attended our efforts in East Persia. A point which I shall always remember with gratitude is the fact that he sternly repressed efforts of junior members of his Staff to interfere in details of our work in East Persia. In the well-known book of Bronsart von Schellendorf, on the duties of the Staff of an army, occurs a remark which I have always

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remembered. It is to the effect that Staff officers who are not overworked are apt to be a nuisance to the troops. This remark was very applicable to a case like ours. Here we were running a "show" hundreds of miles away from the head-quarters of the chief to whom we were responsible, in surroundings, and under conditions difficult for anyone not on the spot to realize. The interference of junior Staff officers burning to show their zeal and energy was apt, in such circumstances, to be particularly noxious. I was therefore extremely fortunate in having as my chief one who so thoroughly realized and appreciated this form of evil himself. Possibly in the course of his own service he had on some occasion suffered from it himself, but he certainly effectively suppressed any tendencies of it in his own Staff. A cipher, telegram "Personal, for General Wapshare," at once put any little matter of this sort right. Trust and confidence in a subordinate such as I was privileged to receive from General Wapshare only redoubles one's determination to strive "to the *n*th" for such a chief, and I hope that on looking back on the time he is able to feel that his confidence was not misplaced.

Lieut.-Colonel V. P. B. Williams, of the 4th Cavalry, had been appointed A.Q.M.G. on my Staff. He was, however, at the time serving with the South Persia Rifles at Shiraz, and as I could not expect to see him for some time General Wapshare lent me, from his own Staff, Captain Etheridge,

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D.A.A.G., to act. On Captain Etheridge fell the bulk of the Staff spade-work of the early and most strenuous days of organizing our line, and it was with much regret that I parted with him when, later on, his services were urgently required back at Quetta.

Our stay at Quetta was limited to the shortest possible time needed to go into matters, receive my instructions from General Wapshare and to collect servants willing to face the terrors of the unknown in Persia. The latter was successfully accomplished through the medium of the Chief of Police at Quetta, Mr. Beatty, a genial character well known throughout Western India for his knowledge and success in dealing with the fraternity who inhabit the western marches of our Eastern Empire. While at Quetta I met, amongst others who had been to East Persia, a charmingly naïve young officer. Talking about East Persia, he said quite solemnly that as I was going there he wanted to give me one very useful "tip." It was always to keep well "in" with the mechanical transport officers. If you did that, he said, there was never any difficulty in getting up any amount of kit or stores you wanted for yourself, it did not matter what the size or weight was. I thanked the youth profusely for his valuable information and "tip."

All preparations complete, we started, Good, Etheridge, Christison, and myself. Our first stage was by rail, by the branch line from Quetta to Nushki,

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at the time in course of extension to the Persian frontier. Railway rolling-stock, like other exotic things, deteriorates rapidly in the East, as most travellers by branch lines in India, where the oldest vehicles are used, know to their cost. Though the stationmaster at Quetta assured us that he had done his best for us, the carriages that were provided to take us to railhead on the new line did not inspire us with confidence at first sight. The lights would not work. The water-tank had, apparently, long ago ceased to be capable of holding water. This, however, did not worry us much as the washhand basin below it had the appearance of regular use as a kitchen sink, notwithstanding the injunctions over it, in several languages of Hindustan, that it was to be used for no other purpose than washing the hands and face. We had with us, of course, our camp buckets. But these trifles were nothing compared to our anxiety when the train moved. From the jolts and gratings it appeared that the wheels, springs, and in fact every part of the vehicle, were in keeping with the water-tank, and we began to have serious doubts whether we should succeed in reaching railhead in it. We were, however, approaching Persia, a country that seems to possess a guardian angel protecting all forms of vehicles when they are long past the stage when, in other countries, they would have been consigned to the scrap-heap. Whether thanks to this guardian angel or not one cannot say, but we did eventually arrive safely at

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railhead in it. We had one alarm at Nushki, which was the end of the open part of the line, as the stationmaster there stated that he had instructions not to run the "best" vehicles on to the newly laid line and desired to shift us into a vehicle more in keeping with the permanent way beyond. In view of my instructions to get to my post with all speed, the prospect of continuing the journey in a carriage less "good" than the one we were in could not be entertained. It appeared to be a case for Irish eloquence and persuasiveness, so Good was deputed to discuss the matter with the stationmaster. He accomplished his mission with complete success, and in a few minutes we were once again on the move, attached to a goods train taking stores to Dalbandin. Jolting along during the night we reached Dalbandin the next morning. This little oasis, previously boasting of a single mud pool, had grown into quite a considerable place under the influence of the railway. The "station" was surrounded by a number of huts, and water having been procured by pumping, a number of patches of vegetables and other green matter had sprung into existence. A hot breakfast, kindly provided for us by the local engineer of the line, was as welcome as unexpected. After a short stay at Dalbandin we were attached to another goods train and continued on our journey. The track was laid over a flat and howling desert, some description of which has already been given. For the next hundred miles

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water for the engine had to be carried in special water-tanks behind the engine. In the far distance to the south, some trace of hills was visible, elsewhere the eye stretched over a sandy waste devoid of any features whatsoever. We rolled on through the afternoon and night and arrived at our destination, Juzakh, the following morning. Juzakh is a place possessing a few springs, some 12 miles from the Persian frontier. It did not lie directly on the line the railway was taking on its onward march, so a short branch had been taken off the main track and a temporary railhead formed here for the use of the East Persian force, pending the further advance of the railway along the selected alignment. Around the sidings constituting the station had been grouped a number of depots, the tents being banked up with bales to protect them from the wind, echoes of the dread hurricane from Seistan. A certain number of huts had been erected for the personnel. They were really dug-outs, the sides and roof constructed of railway sleepers, their backs to the wind, and afforded effective protection against the heat and wind. Juzakh remained our base till the railway reached Duzdab, when the base was transferred there and nearly 100 miles of road cut off our line of communications. I was now within the sphere of my new activities, and formally, on paper, took over charge of my new duties. Lieut.-Colonel Mark Synge, who had been appointed Assistant-Director of Supplies and Transport for

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the new Line of Communications, had arrived at Juzakh a few days before and had taken the opportunity of running out to Khwash, 120 miles distant to the south. Khwash has already been referred to as the scene of General Dyer's exploits against the Sarhad raiders. Being one of the few fertile spots in this inhospitable region, a post had been established there both with a view to overawing the Sarhadis and collecting the supplies which this region produced. To the west of Khwash rose the twin volcano of Kuh-i-Taftan, the peaks of which were clearly visible from Juzakh. So long as railhead remained at Juzakh, the post at Khwash was within my jurisdiction; but as it was a matter of importance to push up the line without delay, I could not afford the time needed for a personal visit to the place.

Good, to whom I intended to allot the southernmost section of the line, now took over the arrangements at the base from the temporary road commandant previously installed there, while Mark Synge went into the all-important transport question. The growth of the old anti-gun-running force into the present East Persian Cordon had been a series of sudden leaps, so to speak, with each extension of the force and enlargement of the scope of its duties. The result had been a succession of makeshift arrangements to meet each emergency as it arose, producing a woeful state of patchwork so far as the transport was concerned. At Juzakh

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there were portions of no less than five organized camel corps, the remainder of these corps all over the place, some believed to be several hundreds of miles away near Meshed. There were portions of a Ford van and light lorry units. Besides the organized corps a quantity of camel transport had been hired through the political officers both here and from British Baluchistan, and these also seemed to be well scattered about the line. The tangle had to be unravelled somehow and some system evolved out of the chaos, and this had to be done while the show was kept running. It is one thing to unravel tangles if you can put up the shutters for a time, quite another if business has to go on as usual. But before anything could be done it was necessary to ascertain exactly what the situation was all over the line, and not to attempt straightening things out till this could be done as part of a considered whole.

The transport question was also agitating the local political officers, but from a different point of view. The collapse of Russia and shutting off of the previous considerable import of merchandise from Transcaspia into East Persia had created a great demand in this region for similar goods from Indian markets. Traders were crowding to push their merchandise up from India. But simultaneously with the collapse of Russia had come an increase to our military responsibilities in East Persia, which in their turn created an increased demand for camel

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transport to maintain the troops. On the one hand were the increasing demands of the military authorities for camels, on the other were the wails of the traders who could not get their merchandise up for lack of transport. There appeared to be an idea among the political officers that the military authorities were not making the best use of the camel transport they had already got, and that the needs of both the traders and the military could be met if the management of the whole of the transport were in political hands. Major Hutchinson, the Political Agent at Chagai, whose sphere extended over all that part of Baluchistan which adjoined Persia, had worked out a scheme which he transmitted to head-quarters, but was told to refer it to me on my arrival. On my arrival at Juzakh I found him awaiting me with his scheme. Mark Synge and I had a long morning's discussion with Hutchinson. His scheme was that the whole of the transport, both Government and hired, was to be handed over to him, in return for which he undertook to send up, as far as Birjand, all the military stores we wanted, using the transport not needed for military stores to carry traders' goods. Much as one sympathized with Hutchinson's solicitude for the traders, the proposal to hand over the whole of the transport arrangements of a line of communications in time of war to a civil agency, however well-intentioned, was quite out of the question, and I had to telegraph to General Wapshare accordingly.

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Hutchinson could not have been present personally continuously in East Persia, or even at the base, and the working of the scheme was bound to have been left in the hands of his babus and agents. Those who know India and the Indian babu can appreciate the merry and bright time my Staff would have had, had such a scheme been put in force. But though unable to help us in the particular way he wanted to, Hutchinson continued to work with untiring zeal in the interests of both our line and of the traders, and we received on many occasions most valuable assistance and co-operation from him.

The cars which had been sent down from Birjand to take us up the line having arrived, we pushed on after spending only a day at Juzakh. To Good, who remained in charge at the base, I could give only general instructions until I had been over the whole line and was able to formulate definite arrangements. He, however, knew all the conditions and circumstances and my views, and would be able to act in a way that would further our plans when these could be definitely settled.

It has been mentioned in Chapter III, in describing the country in this region, that to the south of the Nushki desert lie rugged and generally barren hills, which curl up round the west of the desert, meeting similar hills coming down from the East Persian highlands, in the neighbourhood of Kuh-i-Malik Siah. These southern hills approach the Balucho-

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Afghan frontier west of Juzakh, and then run nearly parallel to the frontier as far as Robat. The camel road to Robat, which had been patched sufficiently to allow of light cars traversing it, ran north-west from Juzakh, and then winding round these hills followed their northern foothills till within a few miles of Robat. The whole distance from Juzakh to Robat was 100 miles, and neither road surface nor scenery were such as would have attracted motorists bent on pleasure. On the left, as one proceeded, was a range of bleak and barren hills; on the right a stony plain leading down to the Afghan frontier, beyond which lay a howling sandy wilderness such as we had traversed between Nushki and Juzakh. On each side of the road, which was a mere clearing along the stony plain, lay the white skeletons of camels every few hundred yards. In the hill range to our left and about half-way to Robat, was a place called Kacha, a spot which, boasting of a few trees and a stream of water, had been used as a head-quarters and a sanatorium in the early days of the Cordon. As there was still a post and a hospital at Kacha, I had arranged to take it on the way. We accordingly left our cars where the track to Kacha branched off from the main road, sending them on some miles farther to where another exit from Kacha again met it. From the main road we rode to Kacha on mules that had been sent down for us. Though no doubt the place would have seemed a paradise to men, and

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especially sick men, who had spent months in the surrounding wildernesses, its celestial features did not strike very forcibly those who, like ourselves, were fresh from civilization. The hospital was maintained as a resting-place for sick or wounded coming down the line *en route* to the railway, being a better place for awaiting a hospital train than Juzakh. When the railway reached Duzdab, Kacha, together with the rest of the dismal road line between Robat and Juzakh, was abandoned. Our diversion via Kacha and the inspection of the various halting-stages on the road occupied some time, and we only reached Robat as the sun set.

Robat had been the head-quarters of the anti-gun-running force which was the predecessor of the East Persian Cordon. Having been in existence as a military post for some time, it bore some of outward traces of civilization. Buildings had been erected for the troops and depots; there was also a small stream and some trees. But it was a dismal spot. Situated in a gorge on the south side of the Kuh-i-Malik Siah, the hill where "three empires meet," it was enclosed on all sides by black, barren and precipitous cliffs, recalling the class of scenery that is put on the stage to depict the haunts of Mephistopheles in productions of "Faust." The place was also unhealthy, the water supply being bad and drinking water having to be brought on mules from a spring 4 miles off. The place was infested with noxious insects which would not be

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denied a share of the accommodation in the buildings which had been erected. As the place would be off the track when the railway reached Duzdab, I decided that when this occurred Robat should be abandoned, and arranged for supplies and other stores to be reduced in anticipation of its decease, all stuff coming up being pushed on and dumped at Hurmukh, a few miles farther on, in lieu. At the hospital the medical officer said he had an individual, dropped by the last convoy of prisoners that had come from Transcaspia, who was evidently in a bad way, but they could do nothing with him as he understood no known language. He turned out to be a Caucasian Turk, and as he understood a little Russian I succeeded in making him and the medical officer intelligible to each other.

As we wanted to reach Shusp, if possible, the next day, an early start had to be made, so a good deal of the inspection of Robat had to be done in the dark. Mark Synge had, as usual on these occasions, a hard task, endeavouring to compress a thorough inspection of the supply depot and its accounts into a short space of time. During the night we had ample evidence of the reputed activity and enterprise of the insect world of Robat.

The following morning we made an early start in the grey of the dawn, reaching Hurmukh after a short run, our cars putting up innumerable coveys of "see-see," which made one wish for a gun, a wish that could not, of course, be gratified in the

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strenuous circumstances of the time. Hurmukh, though by no means an ideal spot for a honeymoon, was a great improvement on Robat, as I had been led to suppose from what I had heard of it. It was situated where a valley between the low hills opened out, there being plateaux on each side of the nulla bed, similar to those called *raghzas* on the Indian north-western frontier. On these plateaux troops and depots of supplies could be comfortably housed out of the reach of spates, should such occur, as we found afterwards they occasionally did. There was fresh air and good water, both of which were lacking at Robat. It was, of course, like all the surrounding country, terribly hot in summer. A mechanical transport company had appreciated the advantages of Hurmukh, and had spread themselves out on one of the plateaux mentioned.

Having taken in the points of the locality, we pushed on without delay as we had a long journey in front of us. Between the Robat hills and the Qainat highlands runs, in a north and south direction, a long low range known as the "Palangan Kuh," or "Leopard hill." To the east of the Palangan Kuh a stony plain slopes downwards, gradually transforming itself into a sandy waste which extends to the shores of the Hamun lakes. After leaving Hurmukh, we emerged from the hills and our route now lay in a northerly direction, parallel to the Palangan Kuh, along this stony plain, the track

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having been selected where the stoniness of the foothills lessens in quantity, but before the full sandiness of the desert is reached. The track ran for 50 miles in an almost straight line over this plain to a spot called Mukhi Surkh, where a spur from the Palangan Kuh juts out into the plain. At the foot of this spur was a brackish spring, the first water we had seen since leaving Hurmukh. Camel convoys could not, therefore, follow the straight track across the plain by which we had come, but were obliged to follow a track skirting the foothills where water, of sorts, was available every 10 miles or so. At one of these intermediate halting-places, Jarika by name, the water was so impregnated with salts that the place was nicknamed by the force the "East Persian Spa." The north-west frontier of India boasts of several places famed for the spa-like quality of their waters, but it was generally agreed by those who knew both, that Jarika could give points to any of them. In those days of the future when East Persia is fully opened up to the world a fortune awaits the enterprising individual who exports Jarika water to Europe at a guinea a bottle. The water of the spring at Mukhi Surkh, though nothing like up to the standard of that of its sister Jarika, was yet avoided when possible for filling up the radiators of motor vehicles, owing to the thick deposit of salt it invariably left in that delicate part of a car's mechanism. But its water was the least of the charms of Mukhi Surkh.

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The reader can no doubt recall a class of picture of which there are generally some examples in all Art exhibitions, viz. that in which lost souls are depicted as wandering through space. The effect of the surroundings which the artist tries to produce in such pictures was here before one in grim reality as one contemplated the scenery of Mukhi Surkh. A gaunt and awe-inspiring cliff jutting out from bleak and barren hills on one side, a howling wilderness devoid of any vestige of vegetation on the other. The atmosphere filled with sand driven by the wind from Seistan. About this time the papers from Home were discussing the problem of what was to be done with the Kaiser when the war should be over. The local comment was that we had in East Persia a spot, Mukhi Surkh, which combined in itself all the qualities desired by the Home Press in a future place of residence for that august personage.

From Mukhi Surkh another 50 miles had to be traversed through surroundings of a similar character before the gradual ascent to the East Persian highland region began. We made a diversion to a small supply depot which, in order to be near water, had been located some miles off the main track, in the Palangan hills. This diversion and crossing some bad sandy stretches considerably delayed us, and the sun was getting low in the west when we found ourselves gradually rising towards the hills that began to loom up before us, and it was dark when we traversed what was known as the Khunik Pass, leading on to

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the plateau on which Neh is situated. It was too late to attempt to reach Shusp that day, so we put up for the night at Khunik village, a few miles from Neh, where another small supply depot had been located. The air of this region was very refreshing after the hot and dusty journey over the plains below, and the feeling was akin to that well-known to Anglo-Indians when they approach a hill station after a spell of hot weather in their plains stations below. We were now obviously well in Persia, for we heard genuine Persian spoken all around us, while the inhabitants all wore the characteristic round felt hats of Persia, and were different in every way from the Indian-like Baluchis of Robat and Juzakh, with rags wound turban-like round their heads as headgear.

The following day we moved on to Shusp, 26 miles, stopping for a few minutes on the way to examine a curious form of windmill seen about here. The wind instead of rotating arms revolving about a horizontal axis, as in the ordinary windmill, rotated a series of things like doors revolving about a vertical axis. The windmill, in fact, bore a strong resemblance to the revolving glass doors often seen at home at the entrance to hotels and places of public resort. The vertical shaft drives the millstones located in chambers below the ground-level.

Shusp is on an elevated plateau, some 6,000 feet high, and enjoyed what in India would be called a hill-station climate. It had been made the head-

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quarters of the Ford Van Company, whose energetic commander, Major Burt, had not only housed his personnel and workshops in locally built mud huts with *gumbaz* roofs, but had started work on an excellent road southwards towards Neh. He seemed to have a gift for organizing and getting good work out of local labour, and in view of the shortage of engineers on the line I asked Burt if he had any inclination for an appointment in that branch. His heart was, however, in his Ford vans, and as our great essential in East Persia was men who had their hearts in their particular jobs, I did not press the matter further. Shusp, in addition to the pleasant temperature of its uplands, possessed good water, so it was duly marked down as the place for a sanatorium for the line. The following day we moved on to Birjand, the head-quarters of the Cordon. There was a slow descent from Shusp along open plateaux and broad valleys down to the main Birjand valley. This valley starting in the centre of the Qainat highlands runs in a westerly direction, getting gradually broader, and ends near Khusp, which is on the edge of the Central Persian Desert. The valley is mostly stony and arid, 5 to 10 miles wide, but is dotted about with spots of green wherever springs issue from the foot of the hills bounding the valley. Around these springs are built the villages with their patches of cultivation. Birjand town is situated in the centre of the valley, midway between the hills on either side.

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From a distance, like other towns and villages of the Qainat, it looks a brown mass, the houses being all, or nearly all, built of mud bricks with the usual *gumbaz* roof. The better houses are, as in other parts of Persia, enclosed in courtyards, nothing being visible from the outside but a high bare wall, thereby ensuring that freedom from the public gaze so essential to the ladies of a Persian family.

Brig.-General Dale, who was commanding the East Persian Cordon, had occupied one of the larger houses on the outskirts of the town. It consisted of the usual courtyard, round which were ranged a series of rooms, occupied by Dale, his Staff, and offices, the courtyard being entered by an elaborate arched gateway. From the outside the place presented the usual appearance of four blank walls. Here accommodation was found for myself and the officers who had accompanied me from Quetta. I met Dale and handed over to him his copy of the instructions under which the East Persian Cordon became the East Persian Line of Communications, with himself as Defence Commander and myself in charge of Administration. We set to work rearranging our Staff, offices and other matters in accordance with the new instructions. The best relations always existed between Dale and myself and between our respective Staffs, a condition that was essential where two organizations, such as ours, had to work side by side and, to a certain extent, interlaced. It was with genuine regret that we parted later on

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when, on its being decided that two senior officers were no longer needed, both defence and administration were placed in my hands.

The following morning I paid a ceremonial visit, accompanied by my Staff, to the Shaukat-ul-Mulk, the Governor of the Qainat and Seistan, who had his residence about 3 miles outside the town. The Shaukat was a man of about thirty, and the governorship was hereditary in his family, he having succeeded his father some ten years previously. I had been warned, before leaving India, that the Shaukat was a man of reputed anti-British views, and that delicate handling would be necessary in my relations with him. It was no surprise, therefore, to find him, at my first visit, very cold and formal in his manner, but when he found that I could speak Persian fluently, the ice soon melted. But more of this anon.

More weighty matters than ceremonial visits now needed attention. Our task was to make all the preparations necessary to enable a large force to be sent up the line should the serious contingencies contemplated mature. It would have been preferable to go on to Meshed, see the northern part of the line and discuss present and future requirements in Transcaspia before starting a reorganization of the line. But minutes were precious and things had to be got moving without further delay. The framework of the reorganization was therefore, so to speak, got out in the rough and pieced together

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at once, the final touches being given to the work after we had been to Meshed and were in possession of the complete information we sought.

The three most urgent matters that had to be taken in hand were: (*a*) the improvement or construction of a road along the line; (*b*) calculation of the amount and nature of transport needed and its proper distribution; and (*c*) the division of the line into sections and organization and distribution of the personnel and the various services to the best advantage. These problems will be dealt with in turn in the next three chapters.

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CHAPTER VI

THE ROADMAKING PROBLEM

There is a saying that "the best is the enemy of the good," a saying very applicable to the road-making problem as it presented itself to us on my arrival in East Persia. Time did not permit of exhaustive reconnaissances to find the best lines to follow. A great deal of work had already been done in improving the existing tracks. General Dale had given orders that all troops marching in East Persia were to carry tools and improve the roads as they went along, and these orders had been loyally carried out. The amount of work done in this way by infantry columns during what were often long and trying marches conveying and assisting transport was most remarkable, and a splendid tribute to the grit and endurance of these troops. The best test of the true discipline and soldierly qualities of a regiment is uncongenial work cheerfully and efficiently carried out under unfavourable conditions of fatigue and bad weather, and nobly did these troops respond to such a test. The 19th Punjabis and the 98th Infantry deserve to be specially mentioned in this respect. These columns of troops

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had, however, followed either existing tracks or routes indicated by guides, in neither case necessarily the best alignment to be followed in making a new road. But the amount of work already done on these tracks was a matter that could not be ignored, especially where time was such an important factor and the "best" had in many cases to be sacrificed in order to obtain quickly the reasonably "good."

It will be convenient now to review briefly the route as we found it on arriving in East Persia and mention the various measures taken, commencing with the south. (See plan at end.)

The first portion was from Juzakh to Robat and Hurmukh, 100 miles. The existing track ran along the northern edge of the Kacha range, between that range and the Afghan frontier desert. The railway line was in process of construction westwards to Duzdab, on an alignment south of that range. As soon as the railway was opened to Duzdab, this road north of the Kacha range would no longer be required and would be abandoned. In the meantime, therefore, I gave instructions that no money or labour should be expended on this portion that was not absolutely essential to enable Ford vans to get over it somehow during the interval. But what was a matter of great importance was a piece of new road, 36 miles in length, to join Duzdab and Hurmukh and enable the road base to be shifted to Duzdab from Juzakh as soon as the railway reached the former

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place. A regiment of Pioneers, the 107th, was under orders to come to East Persia, and their first task would be the construction of this piece of road. It was therefore arranged for an advance officer of the regiment to meet Major Packenham Walsh, the senior R.E. officer on the line, to go over the alignment and arrange suitable camping places, etc., before arrival of the regiment. They in due course arrived and got the Duzdab–Hurmukh connection completed before the railway reached Duzdab, a fine piece of rapid roadmaking and, like all the work done by this regiment in East Persia, of excellent quality. Two low passes were crossed, and as the ground was hard no metalling was needed except a short piece from the base on the Duzdab Plain. A mechanical transport officer described this portion of road made by the Pioneers as a "Brooklands track."

The next portion to be considered was that between Hurmukh and Shusp or Neh. Between these two localities there runs, in a north and south direction, the "Palangan" range of hills, of which mention has been made in a previous chapter. On the east side the ground from the foot of the "Palangan Kuh" slopes gently and uniformly down to the Hamun Lakes. On the west lay a succession of open valleys, separating the Palangan from other low hills and broken ground which lie to the west of it and between that range and the deserts of Central Persia. The alternatives before us were either a

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road skirting the east of the Palangan or one running up the valleys to the west of it. The old track, which had already been worked on by passing troops and by a detachment of sappers and miners, lay on the east side. For some distance it coincided with the route to Seistan, the latter then branching off and passing round the south side of the Hamun Lakes. Apart from the connection with Seistan, in itself of value, this route had the advantage of a firm surface that would not need metalling and lay across an open plain devoid of engineering obstacles. From Hurmukh to Mukhi Surkh, where a spur of the Palangan jutted out, the road could follow a line as straight as if ruled with pencil and ruler, while from Mukhi Surkh to the Khunik Pass there were straight stretches almost equally long. On the other hand, there was an absence of water, except along the actual foot of the Palangan, which would necessitate having a different route for camels convoys if the motor road took advantage of the straight short cut across the plain east of the Palangan.

The survey which had been made for the projected extension of the railway to Neh followed, on the other hand, the valley route west of the Palangan. This route had not been used by troops and convoys, no work had been done on it and little was known of it except from the reports of the railway officers who had surveyed the line. But it was evident that the route had several advantages. There was water, not in superabundant quantities,

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but still water, along it. The engineering difficulties, though somewhat greater than along the plain to the east, were not formidable. The Palangan range would protect the route and the halting places along it, to some extent, from the terrors of the *sad-o-bist* wind, which worked its will unchecked on the plain to the east. But the most weighty consideration was that, by constructing the road along the same route that the railway would follow, advantage could be taken of each advance of railhead to lengthen the rail and shorten the road part of the line of communications, whereas on the east we should be cut off from the railway till it met us again at Neh.

A decision had to be made, and at once. There was no time to send out and have the route carefully reconnoitred. We had to set to work without delay, as every moment was of importance. It took some hard thinking, but I decided to stick to the known and existing route east of the Palangan. Time being such an important factor, the amount of work already done on this route carried a ruling weight. The evils of this route, such as they were, were well known, while in the case of the other, attractive as its advantages appeared to be, there would have been somewhat of a leap in the dark. As it turned out, the amount of labour we expended on improving the "east coast route" would have provided a good road along the western valleys with its many advantages, but it is easy to be wise after

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the event, as many critics were. I doubt if many, with the information and considerations before them that I had at the time, would have come to a different decision.

Between Neh and Shusp the road problem was easy. The long gently sloping plateau of solid ground was easily traversed by a straight road with a good surface. The work had already been largely done, thanks to the energy of Major Burt, of No. 5 M.T. Company. The plan he had adopted, of digging a ditch on either side and throwing the earth into the centre to form a raised surface, answered admirably with the class of soil we had in this part of the line. Trodden down by the passing of camel convoys, the raised portion soon acquired a hard smooth surface, unaffected by rain and admirable for the passage of motor traffic. Burt's system was generally followed in our roadmaking operations where the same class of soil was met with.

The 102 miles from Shusp to Birjand lay for the most part over plateaux and valleys capable of furnishing a suitable road surface without metalling. A good deal of work had been done by the troops, but a lot of straightening out and levelling was needed to enable motor convoys to run comfortably. In two places on this stretch we had, however, the worst enemy of the road problem in Persia—sand. A bad stretch just north of Shusp was avoided by following a somewhat longer alignment round the edge, instead of through the middle, of the valley.

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General View of Birjand.

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The second stretch could not be avoided, and had to be treated by one or other of the recognized but not too satisfactory means of alleviating the sand nuisance. A lightly laden Ford will float over a good deal of sand in which a heavier car would stick, but a succession of the lightest laden Fords in a convoy soon cuts it up. Once stuck in sand, rotating the wheels simply churns up the sand without moving the vehicle and, incidentally, buries the wheels deeper. When badly stuck the only remedy is to unload the vehicle and requisition the aid of any men or animals in sight to drag it out. One recognized textbook method of dealing with sand is to lay wire netting on the surface, but experiments we made showed that the netting is liable to cut up and be productive of tyre troubles. The most effective method we found was to dig out a foot or more of the sand and fill in the space with stones. But where the sand difficulty exists stones are not, as a rule, available close at hand, and unless close at hand the cost of this method is prohibitive. A simpler method is to carpet the roadway transversely with any form of desert scrub available. It does not last long and requires frequent renewing, but is effective while it lasts. The evil of a sandy tract is not only in the soft surface, but also the drifting sand blown by the wind, which sometimes obliterates the road with a coating that for motor stopping purposes is worse than the original surface of the sand. We found that a road with a well-raised surface was much

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less liable to obstruction by drifting sand than one more nearly level with the ground surface. The wind seems to catch the raised surface and blow off the drift sand settled on it. That is to say any ordinary wind does. A demon like the *sad-o-bist* of Seistan carries away the whole raised surface itself. An accentuated form of the drift sand evil are the creeping sand hills mentioned in Chapter III. They were the worst form of natural evil those in charge of our roads had to contend with, but fortunately they only occurred in a few favoured spots.

As in the case of other sections, the road from Shusp to Birjand followed the old caravan track which had been used and improved by our troops. A short cut was found later which enabled a camel convoy to save a day on the section and which possessed the great essential—water. But the work on the main route had been practically completed when this short cut was discovered, and though some convoys did try it in fine weather, I vetoed any money being spent on it. Apart from other considerations, there is a great advantage in making camel traffic use the M.T. road, when this is not metalled. The camel's broad flat foot is a very effective implement for smoothing out ruts and keeping a good surface on a road, and camel traffic certainly saved, to a great extent, repair gangs. Camel convoys were, therefore, made as far as possible to follow the motor road. The chief exception was the piece between Hurmukh and Mukhi Surkh, where,

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as previously mentioned, the M.T. road took a short straight cut across the waterless plain, while camels had to follow the windings of the foothills on account of water.

The heaviest part of the roadmaking work in East Persia lay, however, to the north of Birjand. Between that place and Qain the route crossed three mountain ranges at right angles. The old track existed and a good deal had been done, as in other parts, by passing troops, but the passes needed heavy work and an extensive use of explosives. From Qain to Turbat-i-Haidari there were two alternative routes, an easterly and a westerly one. The easterly ran north-east from Qain to Rui Khaf, turning then almost due west to Turbat. The westerly ran north-west from Qain to Gunabad (Jumin), thence northwards to Turbat. The westerly was two marches shorter than the easterly, but otherwise the bulk of the advantages seemed to lie with the latter. The Meshed–Seistan telegraph line, originally constructed by the Russians and now being used by our force, followed the easterly route through Rui Khaf. It has been mentioned that between the Khorasan and Qainat block of highlands a tongue of the Central Persian Desert runs through to the Afghan frontier. Both routes had, of course, to traverse this tongue, but it was narrower in the east than in the west. On the Rui Khaf route it could be crossed in one march. On the westerly line this was not possible, and a halt in mid desert was a necessity

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for animal convoys with the perennial difficulty—water. There was only one well of very brackish water at the mid-desert halting place, Robat-i-Mahi.[1] Again, on the easterly route, around Rui Khaf, was a considerable fertile area from which grain and supplies could be and were being drawn, and though the westerly line had also a fertile district in Gunabad it was not equal in quality or quantity to Rui Khaf. Rui Khaf was, further, favourably situated as a point from which to overawe raiders who made Afghan territory the base for their activities, for which purpose a post had been established there, its supply depot acting as a collecting centre for the produce of the surrounding district. Both routes had been used by troops moving to the north, and the conditions on both were well known. It was obviously impossible to duplicate the line of communications, and one route had to be selected on which to concentrate work and energies. From what has been said above it will be seen that the balance of advantages seemed to lie with Rui Khaf route, but in view of the contingency for which we were working, the dispatch of a large force into North-east Persia, the shorter distance of the western

[1] We found later an ancient and disused underground channel that had evidently been used in bygone ages for bringing water from the north to this halting place in the centre of the desert. The engineer of the section managed, without an excessive expenditure of labour, to make this channel do once again the work for which it was originally intended, and we were able by means of it to bring a reasonable amount of water to this stage.

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route outbalanced everything else, and it was decided on as the main line. As the telegraph ran by the other route we had to put up a field line between Qain and Gunabad, which was later on joined up with Turbat, giving up a duplicate telegraph connection in this area. General Dale, who was defence commander, considered it essential to retain his post at Rui Khaf, so it was arranged that the detachment there should be supplied by " branch line " convoys from Qain, which brought back the produce of Rui Khaf on the return journeys.

The chief roadmaking difficulties on the Qain–Gunabad–Turbat section were in two places. The first was a 20-mile stretch of what is known in India as *pat*, north of Qain, and the second the sand of the tongue of desert between Gunabad and Turbat. The *pat* of the former was an excellent surface when dry, but a quagmire after rain. A new alignment was found by Major Lang of the Seistan Levy Corps, which was a little longer, but which avoided the *pat* by skirting the hills to the south. The desert tongue there was no getting round, and it continued to give us trouble to the end with drift sand and creeping sand hills.

The cultivated area around Gunabad and again near Turbat was productive of another form of trouble for our road engineers. The Persian cultivator is no respector of roads, and if he wants to get his water to a certain point he cuts through roads without the least compunction. It was rather

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disconcerting, not to speak of delaying, when a motor convoy suddenly found itself confronted by a deep ditch cut across the road during the night. As likely as not the leading driver, thinking from previous journeys that the road was clear in the particular locality, had driven his van into the ditch and replacement of broken springs and wheels was added to the other sources of delay. There was fortunately in Gunabad a pottery where fairly good earthenware pipes could be got, so with the assistance of the local governor the inhabitants were warned that if anyone wanted a watercourse across the road at any point he should inform the section engineer, who would arrange to lay a drain under the road which would answer the purpose of the cultivator without obstructing the traffic. The governor added in his proclamation, and entirely on his own, a penalty of 500 strokes of the bastinade to anyone who disregarded the notice and damaged the road. Needless to say the penalty was never enforced, nor would it have been countenanced by our people, but it was satisfactory evidence of good will on the part of the local governor.

The stiffest roadmaking problem of all lay in the northern section between Turbat-i-Haidari and Meshed. Here there were three mountain ranges to be crossed, all with rocky and precipitous features, not to speak of a 20-mile stretch of *pat* plain, which could not be circumvented. A track already existed which was used by Persian vehicles, but which would cer-

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tainly never have been used by any form of wheeled traffic in any other country. The Khamari Pass, the most serious obstacle, was nothing but a mountain burn running over huge rocky boulders, and over which the vehicles which traversed it had to be man-handled with the aid of ropes. A Hupmobile car had certainly been got over it to Meshed for the use of General Malleson, with the assistance of a plentiful supply of ropes and planks and an exceptionally skilful man in charge. No further attempt was made to get any form of M.T. vehicle over it until the new road had been constructed. We had, fortunately, the services of a very able engineer to tackle the difficulties of this section. Captain Stubbs, an officer of the Indian Public Works Department, who had received a temporary commission in the Royal Engineers during the war, had preceded me to East Persia and been sent up to this section. When I arrived I found that this energetic officer had already traversed the whole of the 90-mile stretch on foot and had worked out complete proposals for dealing with it. These were carried out in full by him. We had one condition to face in this section that we were free from in other parts of the line to the south of it, and that was the existence of a considerable amount of Persian wheeled traffic. If there be no iron-tyred wheeled traffic, an unmetalled road, provided the surface is good, will answer all the purposes of M.T. vehicles running on pneumatic tyres. But iron-tyred vehicles, and

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especially the ponderous four-horse cart used in Khorasan and known as a *fourgon*, very speedily cuts to pieces anything short of a properly metalled road and renders it quite impassable by M.T. vans or ambulances. South of Gunabad there were hardly any Persian wheeled vehicles, and the few that existed could be kept off the motor road without any hardship. But in the more populated Khorasan area Persian-owned vehicles were numerous, and could not be kept off what would become one of the main roads of the province. My instructions were to provide a road fit for light M.T. and ambulance traffic. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to metal this stretch, costly as it would be. Stubbs was therefore instructed to go ahead with all speed with his proposals and to metal his section. Both labour and metalling stone were fortunately plentiful and procurable on the spot. Stubbs worked with monumental energy and in a short time had the road through. The remarkable part of it was that he did the work with practically no trained assistants. We had no staff to give him nor any technical help. He collected locally not only his labour but also his supervising staff, and he certainly seemed to have a genius for discovering latent talent of this kind among the population. All his blasting work was done with miners he got from the turquoise mines at Nishapur and with locally made powder.

The last part of the road to be considered was that from Meshed to Askhabad in Russian Trans-

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caspia. Here we had already a metalled carriage road that had been made by the Russians, badly in need of repair in many places, but still a road that could be used. It was liable to be badly blocked with snow, but this was a contingency we had to be prepared for wherever the road traversed high ground.

Such in brief was the road problem which presented itself when I took over my duties in East Persia. A road had to be made and maintained over these 770 miles fit to carry light mechanical transport, that is M.T. vehicles running on pneumatic tyres. The problem was a tough one in itself, but the toughest part was that, in the words of the famous drill sergeant, it had to be "at once, or sooner," and we were woefully short of people to do it. When I arrived, there were only three engineer officers altogether in the country. There was a small detachment of Indian sappers and miners, which had been specially formed for service in East Persia, a battalion of pioneers was under orders, and an Indian labour corps had just arrived. Quite apart from the larger contingency against which we were preparing, the immediate need of a serviceable road was painfully apparent. Fighting was going on in Transcaspia, and immediate demands for such things as hospital stores had been coming in. In a laudable desire to meet these immediate demands, convoys of Ford vans had been rushed up over tracks quite unfit to carry them, with the result that

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the line was strewn with derelict vehicles which a breakdown convoy was painfully trying to retrieve. A little more of this " immediate demand " business and the whole of the mechanical transport allotted to East Persia would be *hors de combat.* Work must be started on the road immediately and at high pressure, but with what and by whom ?

On my arrival at Birjand, the British Consul for Seistan and the Qainat was Major Prideaux, who was just about to proceed on a well-earned leave after a strenuous period of service in this part of the world during the war. He was being relieved by Mr. B. J. Gould, I.C.S., who had just arrived to take over from him, and I had the advantage of being able to discuss the situation with both these officers. They furnished the answer to the question " with what and by whom ? " It has already been mentioned that Consular levy corps had been raised during the earlier days of the Cordon to assist in intercepting hostile agents moving about the country. The British officers for this levy corps had been mostly drawn from the 106th Hazara Pioneers, the only Persian-speaking regiment in the Indian army, which also furnished a nucleus of native officers and N.C.O.'s for the levies. Coming from a Pioneer regiment they were skilled roadmakers. Here was the staff to undertake the management of the large gangs of local labour that would be needed. Mr. Gould, with generous self-sacrifice and much to the inconvenience of his own levy service, placed a num-

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ber of British officers and Persian ranks of his levy corps at my disposal for roadmaking. And so we got ahead.

The 107th Pioneers worked from Duzdab northwards to Hurmukh. Between Hurmukh and Neh, the country was very largely desert and uninhabited, and local labour was unprocurable. Work in this inhospitable region had therefore to be carried out by the Indian labour corps, sections being also taken in hand by the 107th Pioneers as soon as they had finished the Duzdab–Hurmukh section. These units had a very trying time. Water was scarce and bad, and the summer heat being still at its height when work was started the climate was anything but ideal for prolonged physical labour. An attempt was made to import Persian labour from Seistan, but was not very successful. The men did not like working so far from home and deserted, so that practically the whole of this stretch was made by the 107th Pioneers and the labour corps. A detachment of these corps was formed at Shusp, where men wanting a change could be sent in turn. Extra rations and green vegetables were sent down to these units, but notwithstanding this, scurvy broke out among them, and at one time threatened to become serious.

Major Burt's roadmaking in the neighbourhood of Shusp has already been mentioned. Additional gangs of Persians were recruited and placed under his orders for extending his road outwards from Shusp, meeting the work being done by the labour

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corps in one direction and that supervised by the levy corps in the other.

The heaviest part of the roadmaking lay to the north of Birjand. The detachment of sappers and miners moved from one pass and from one rocky bit to another, blasting the rock where necessary in preparation for the actual road construction, which was carried out by gangs of Persian labour under the supervision of officers and N.C.O.'s of the Seistan levy corps. Major Lang, commandant of the levy corps, and several of his officers were incessantly on the 350 miles of road between Shusp and Turbat during this period, and it grew up like the proverbial mushroom under their efforts.

From some 20 miles south of Turbat to Meshed, 110 miles in all, Stubbs with his armies of local coolies, his herds of donkeys, and his locally extemporized supervising staff, got to work producing what was probably one of Persia's best pieces of road. Stubbs, to do the thing properly, started putting up milestones on his section of road, only to find them regularly knocked down as soon as put up by some person or persons unknown. I mentioned this to the Persian Governor of Turbat on one occasion and asked if he knew of any reason for it. He told me there was a prejudice against milestones, as they were apt to produce impious thoughts in passing wayfarers. For example, a man journeying by road would see on a milestone the legend, " Meshed, 1 farsakh," and rejoicing, would at once say to himself, " Ah, I shall

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be there in an hour," completely forgetting the far more important fact that, whether the distance be one or be fifty farsakhs, the possibility of his ever reaching his destination at all depended solely upon the will of God. And that so heavy a sin of impious forgetfulness had been laid on the soul of the unfortunate traveller was entirely due to the objectionable milestone. I believe this explanation, farfetched as it may appear to Western minds, is the correct one.

But the milestones were also tampered with in another and more mysterious manner. In several places it was found that the whitewash was scraped off, but the stone otherwise left intact. At first it was thought to be merely another way of depriving them of their impious influences, but it was found that this was not so, and that on the contrary this action was due to belief in certain beneficent properties of the otherwise objectionable milestone. It appeared that certain village ladies along the route, who had been unable to present their lords and masters with a son and heir, had scraped the whitewash off the milestones and swallowed it as a specific. By what process of reasoning this idea was arrived at, I was never able to discover.

And thus, in the manner described above, and largely with improvised tools but wielded with British energy and determination, the 600 miles that lay between the railway and Meshed was made " fit for light mechanical transport." The work was

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everywhere in hand, and in most places completed, when the Armistice removed the immediate possibility of the larger contingency against which we had been working with such feverish speed. But we had troops in Transcaspia where fighting was still in progress, and I received instructions to complete the road to the standard named. Within four months of starting work a long convoy of motor ambulances conveying sick and wounded from Transcaspia ran, without incident or mishap, from Meshed to railhead.

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CHAPTER VII

THE TRANSPORTATION PROBLEM

But the roadmaking problem, referred to in the last chapter, was by no means the only one that had to be dealt with on the "at once or sooner" principle, on my arrival in East Persia. An equally burning one was that of transportation. We had to supply a force operating 770 miles from the Indian railhead, besides the troops guarding and administering this long line, parts of which were devoid of supplies. We had in addition to stock and prepare this line, and the advanced base at the end of it, with all that would be needed, to pass up the line the large force that it was intended to employ in the event of the Turco-German wave across Persia maturing. And immediately on my arrival at Birjand came a telegram asking for an estimate by wire of the amount of transport that would be needed to do all this.

Now the normal method of dealing with such a telegram is to send for the Assistant Director of Supplies and Transport and hand it over to him. He, in his turn, summons a number of subordinates, who set to work with pencil and paper to calculate

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the number of animals needed to bring the specified quota of stores and supplies to the different points. The ordinary method of calculating is by working backwards from the front to the base, as the transport naturally piles up as you get nearer the base from which the stores start. The process is, in fact, a sort of doing "The house that Jack built" backwards, beginning with the "priest, all shaven and shorn," in order to arrive eventually at the quantity of malt that lay in the house that Jack built, the result that is aimed at. The general reader may perhaps not be able to follow me, but anyone who has had anything to do with army transport problems will, no doubt, be able to appreciate the simile.

On receipt of the telegram mentioned above, I handed it over, therefore, in due and ancient form, to Colonel Mark Synge, the A.D.S. and T. The following morning he arrived with several weary-looking assistants, carrying bundles of paper which they had laboriously covered over with figures and on which they had been engaged during the greater part of the previous night. The problem, as it presented itself in East Persia, seemed to have endless ramifications, and Mark Synge himself was by no means satisfied with the results produced by the monumental labours of his assistants during the night. There seemed to be nothing for it but to take such results as they had managed to get and, in order to be sure of being on the right side, to

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multiply by a heavy factor of safety of 3 or thereabouts.

Meanwhile I had been turning the matter over in my own mind and trying to approach it from a different standpoint. When a problem gets complex and rather badly tied up, it is often a good plan to try and get back to the beginning and start afresh from first principles. Applying this to the present case, the first principle appeared to be that troops and services were consumers, and transport were producers, of the same commodity, viz. "transportation energy." Was it not possible to find some unit of this commodity, "transportation energy," in which the appetite of the one and the producing capacity of the other could both be expressed? If this could be done, then the appetite and the producing capacity could be placed on opposite sides of an equation, and the solution of such an equation should give us the results we were aiming at in a simpler manner than by "The house that Jack built" method. This was the germ of the idea which Mark Synge took up and worked out, and on which he evolved the system by which we solved transport problems that were presented to us and which we found gave us very reliable results in a remarkably simple manner.

An endeavour will now be made to describe this system. The unit of transportation energy that was selected was the moving of one ton, once a week, over a distance of one mile, or one "WTM."

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The carrying capacity of every form of transport animal or vehicle we had to deal with could be worked out as the average number of ton-miles it could move weekly, the average being calculated over a sufficient period to allow of grazing, overhaul, etc. The value of our different forms of transport, camels, donkeys, Ford vans, etc., could then be tabulated at so many "WTM's" each respectively.

The consumption of transportation energy could be worked out and expressed in a similar manner. A detachment of troops or the services located at any post required so much food and other supplies or stores per week, which could be expressed in tons or fractions of a ton. This weight of stuff had to be brought a certain distance to the unit or post. The weight multiplied by the distance gave the number of WTM's that would be consumed by the unit or post in question. And this figure divided by the WTM value of the particular form of transport to be used would give the number of that class of transport that would be needed to maintain that post. Where food for the transport was not obtainable *en route* but had to be carried, its weight, multiplied by the distance, had to be added to the WTM consumption of the post, and the combined total divided by the WTM value of the class of transport, to obtain the complete result required.

To make the idea clearer, a few simple illustrations will be given showing the method of working

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the system. To show how the producing capacity of various forms of transport, in transportation energy, was arrived at, two typical cases will be taken, that of a camel and that of a Ford van.

The normal load of a camel, including share of driver's kit, but excluding its own food, is 5 Indian maunds, or 400 lb. To bring this to tons it has to be divided by 2,240. An average day's march is 15 miles, but as on a line of communications the camel has always to return to its starting-point, the average daily distance done *forward* is only half of this, or $\frac{15}{2}$, which has again to be multiplied by 7 to give the result in terms of weeks. Now a camel cannot work continuously, but requires periods of rest and grazing, which in East Persia we calculated at ten days per month, so only two-thirds of the above product could be taken as the average capacity of a camel over a prolonged period. We got thus—

$$\frac{400}{2{,}240} \times \frac{15}{2} \times 7 \times \frac{2}{3} = 6{\cdot}2$$

or say 6 weekly ton-miles as the amount of the transportation energy capable of being produced continuously by one camel.

Similarly, the Ford van. The load of a van, exclusive of driver's kit, ordinary spares and petrol for the day's consumption only, was reckoned at 7 Indian maunds, or 560 lb. The day's run was 75 miles, or five ordinary marches, a distance that

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gave time, after getting in each evening, for cleaning up, etc. This, as in the previous case, had to be divided by 2 and multiplied by 7. Two complete days' rest per week were needed for overhaul, etc., so that in this case we had—

$$\frac{560}{2{,}240} \times \frac{75}{2} \times 7 \times \frac{5}{7} = 46{\cdot}8$$

or, say, 46 weekly ton-miles as the value of the transportation energy capable of being produced continuously by a Ford van. In a similar manner the figure for any form of transport could be calculated, the calculation being based on any particular local conditions under which it had to work.

In the above calculations no allowance is made for the transportation energy consumed by the transport themselves in the shape of carriage of food for the animals or petrol for the vans. It is much more simple and satisfactory to allow for this separately, instead of deducting it from the producing value of the transport. It is impossible to get a "net" value of that kind that will be generally applicable. In East Persia, in the great majority of cases, grain and fodder for transport animals was either dumped at the different stages by contractors, or was brought back from forward posts by empty returning transport, or was supplied by separate "side-loading" convoys from places off the main line of communications. In all of these cases none of their own WTM was consumable

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by the transport working on the main line. In the cases where this was not so, and grain and fodder for their own animals had to be carried by the convoys themselves, it was much simpler to regard this as additional stuff to be carried to a particular post, and its amount added to the WTM consumption of that post. Similarly as regards petrol. The great value of mechanical transport vehicles is the speed with which they convey what they are carrying, and where their numbers are restricted their own carrying energy is far too valuable to be expended in carrying petrol for themselves. We had petrol dumped for them at the different points where they required it by the slower-moving animal convoys, a weekly allotment of petrol being among the items which went to make up the normal WTM consumption of the different posts.

An example will now be given of how the system worked in practice. Take the case of a post, 200 miles from the base, which consumed weekly 25 tons of stores and supplies, of which 5 tons were articles that had to come the whole way from the base, 10 tons were local supplies, but which had to come from a point 100 miles down the line, while the other 10 tons were grain and fodder dumped at the post itself by a local contractor. The transportation energy consumed by this post would work out at $5 \times 200 = 1{,}000$ WTM's for the articles coming from the base, plus $10 \times 100 = 1{,}000$ WTM's for the supplies coming from 100 miles down

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the line, plus nil for those supplied locally. Total, 2,000 WTM's, which divided by 6 would give 333 camels, or by 46 would give 44 Ford vans, as the amount of transport needed to produce the transportation energy required by this particular post. If different classes of transport were being used over the same stretch, the proportions of each could be similarly calculated so as to give the aggregate WTM needs of the post.

If any reader, acquainted with the regulation "House that Jack built" method, will work out by it the case of the post mentioned in the previous paragraph, he will, I think, find the result to be 220 camels. But, for comparison, one-third (110) must be added to this to allow of one-third of the animals being always at rest and grazing and which is allowed for in our WTM value of a camel. The result, 330, will then approximate to the 333 as given in the preceding paragraph, the margin of safety being with the latter. But the main point is to compare the amount of paper covered by figures required to arrive at the result in the regulation manner with the simple calculation given in the preceding paragraph. If this be done, the truth of what has been put forward in these pages will, I think, be readily apparent.

By working out and having at hand sort of "ready-reckoner" tables, giving the needs of different strengths of troops of the various arms and units of the different services, in tons or frac-

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tions of a ton per week, a table of distances on the line and a table of WTM values of the different classes of transport, it was possible to answer questions, as to the effect on the transport situation, of contemplated changes in the strength of troops at the front or on the line of communications, which were frequently coming in, with a minimum of trouble and a minimum burning of midnight oil.

It will be realized that the above system gave us aggregate results by totalling up the needs of the different posts and those of the force at the front. This aggregate total had then, of course, to be divided up among the different sections of the line, but provided reliable totals were obtained, which was the case, the subdivision was a comparative simple matter and easily effected with our ready-reckoner tables. It was, moreover, aggregate totals that were asked for by the authorities in India, in connection with the changes that were proposed from time to time in the strength and disposition of the force, and these our system enabled us to give with a speed and reliability that could hardly have been attained by any other method.

It must be mentioned also that the system described above gave us, of course, results in terms of transport actually in commission, including normal rests and overhauls, but not accidents or loss by wear and tear. The usual addition of 5 to 10 per cent., according to the class of transport, had

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to be made to the aggregate total to provide a reserve to meet such casualties.

Besides the calculation of the amounts of transport necessary to carry out our work on the line, there were a number of other transport matters that needed urgent attention in order to get the transport working satisfactorily on the line.

On our arrival, as has been already mentioned, the transport situation was in a somewhat chaotic condition. Events had been developing rapidly in the north and stores had been pushed up rapidly regardless of consequences. The result was that the different organized camel corps had got mixed up and distributed all over the line, portions apparently temporarily lost to sight. There were bodies of hired transport working similarly without any apparent system, and in addition contractors working on the maundage system with their own transport, that is, conveying articles at fixed rates by weight over specified distances. The mechanical transport was largely distributed all over the line in the form of derelicts, the result of using them to get stores rapidly to the front over tracks unfit to carry them.

It was soon apparent that one of the causes of the chaos was the practice of starting off goods on what are termed "through way bills" from the base to distant destinations on the same transport. Where a line of communications is short, the through convoy and through way bill may answer the pur-

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pose, but on a long line such as we had it is fatal to any orderly system of working. Goods and transport disappear into the blue, they cannot be got at, and by the time they reach their destination the goods may not be wanted, or be wanted in different proportions to those in which they were dispatched from the base.

The first thing we had to do was to confine particular bodies of transport to particular sections of the line. Both organized transport corps and bodies of hired transport would thus work in a definite area only, under the eyes of their own officers, who took an interest in them and return at regular and frequent intervals to the head-quarters of their sections, where they would get their proper periods of rest and have their needs and deficiencies attended to. It took a little thinking out to get this done quickly without dislocating the current flow along the line. Incidentally it took a little rubbing in to make people accustomed to doing things in a haphazard way realize that when a thing was said, it was meant.

As a corollary of the above, it was necessary to stop through way billing and consign goods only from section to section, thereby enabling touch to be kept with them and their passage regulated if necessary. As regards stores and supplies, generally, the system aimed at, and which we shortly got to work satisfactorily, was that the depot at the head-quarters of each section was to be a pool into

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which everything from below flowed, and from which the weekly flow which had to go forward, as well as the needs of the section itself, was taken. Each depot had a standard stock laid down for it of all articles, based on two months' requirements of the section itself, and a standard weekly flow was laid down from each section to the next, based, of course, on the normal requirements of all sections ahead of it. The O.C. the depot then watched his stocks and regulated them, if necessary, by asking the section next below to increase or decrease from the standard, as the case might be, the next week's consignment of the particular article. When an abnormal consumption was expected, as when large bodies of troops were expected to move up or down the line, the sections were warned and a simultaneous increased flow for one or more weeks' beforehand from the base upwards along each of the sections affected enabled the additional demand to be met without dislocating normal stocks or normal working arrangements. In this way was avoided that swaying from side to side, like a badly drilled company marching past, which is fatal to smooth working on a line of communications. It also enabled the supply arrangements to work, as it were, automatically, with a minimum of interference from head-quarters and a minimum blocking of the telegraph line with internal line of communication messages at a time that that line was fully occupied with important messages from the front

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to India. It took a little time and a good deal of hard work on the part of Mark Synge to get the system thoroughly understood and properly carried out by the different officers on the line, many of whom were temporary officers and very inexperienced. But once it was thoroughly understood its smoothness and automatic regulation were appreciated. There is generally a tendency in the Headquarters Supply and Transport Office of any command, with its army of babus, to try and keep everything, and work the minutest details, in its own hands. In the case of a long line of communication, such as we had to deal with, this can only result in blocking the telegraph line, in the supplies along the line flowing by fits and starts, and general chaos such as we found on our arrival.

Another important matter, one essential to orderly working on a road line of communications, but which took a good deal of rubbing in to get properly understood, accepted and acted on, was the principle that transport officers correspond to the drivers and guards of a railway train, they are not and have nothing to do with the booking office. In other words the duty of transport officers is to keep efficient and work their animals or vehicles; it is no concern of theirs what is contained in the packages carried by these animals or vehicles. The total normal carrying capacity of their transport is at the disposal of the "booking office," that is the "Q" Staff. Transport officers have a way of

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assuming a sort of proprietary interest in the carrying capacity of the transport in their charge, and regard it as their right to utilize any portion of it they desire for themselves or their units. Mechanical transport officers are inclined to be the worst offenders in this respect. The remarks of the young officer quoted in Chapter V were, as I found on arrival in East Persia, by no means devoid of foundation. Mechanical transport officers were horrified at the idea of having to apply at the booking office for the carriage of what they called their own Mechanical transport stores, instead of appropriating themselves part of the carrying capacity of a convoy for them. But, horrified or not, they had to do it, for with the difficult transportation problem we had before us, what Mark Synge called "illicit consumption of WTM" had to be ruthlessly put down. It is extraordinary the way things like beer barrels have of getting accidentally mixed up with "technical" stores. I must confess to a feeling of poacher turned gamekeeper in East Persia in this respect. As an R.E. officer in my younger days I had been initiated into the art of waving the "technical reasons" flag in front of the Staff and was well up in most of the tricks of the trade. I warned my Staff, therefore, that whenever "technical reasons" were urged as a reason for doing anything unusual, the matter was to be brought to me personally. And if my practised nostrils scented a rat, the proposal was fearlessly turned down. Needless to say,

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many were, in consequence, the angry whisperings against " this general who imagines he knows more about technical officers' work than they do."

Human nature is strong in all of us, and though I have touched on the manner in which it manifested itself in some of the mechanical transport officers on the line, I have not mentioned it with any idea of disparaging the work done by these officers in East Persia. Far from it. There was no body of officers who wore themselves out more self-sacrificingly in the service of the State in East Persia than these officers did, endeavouring under often most trying conditions to keep their vehicles up to the maximum of efficiency. No one could have felt a greater admiration than I did for the men whom I found so often spending days and nights out in the open in all weathers retrieving broken-down vehicles from the roadside, or covered with grease and mud, in sweltering heat, endeavouring to expedite the recovery of badly broken-down vans. If in my position as chief gamekeeper it was my duty to suppress poaching, the poachers always had the secret sympathy of one who had been a poacher himself at one time.

But my difficulty was not only in getting transport officers out of the booking offices, there was some diffidence on the part of the " Q " Staff and their representatives, the administrative commandants of sections, to taking a firm seat therein. If I may presume to express such an opinion, it had

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often struck me, in the course of my Staff experience in India, that "Q" officers were inclined to let S. and T. officers usurp their functions in this respect. It is the result of the intimate union of the supply and transport branches of the service. In my humble opinion, and I only give it for what it is worth, this union is an unnatural one which brings evil in its train. The fact that one particular commercial firm was the largest consignor of goods to a railway, would not be accepted as sufficient reason for giving that firm complete control of the booking office as well as the traffic and loco departments of that railway. Very much the reverse, I should imagine, especially from the point of view of other firms who had to send goods by that line. In a similar manner the fact that the supply service is the largest consignor of goods for transit by army transport does not appear to be a sound reason for uniting it to, or giving it full control over, the transport service. The supply, like the ordnance, the medical, the engineer, or any other service, should apply to the booking office, that is the "Q" Staff, which allots to each room on the transport available, or if room is insufficient for all, decides their respective orders of urgency. I had in my A.D.S. and T., Colonel Mark Synge, a whole-hearted supporter of this idea, and though, in view of his position, he was the head himself of the supply, the mechanical transport and animal transport services, the union went no farther down the hierarchy, and the

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supply and transport duties were kept quite separate both in his office and, what was more important, in the sections, thereby largely removing the natural tendency to action in opposition to the principles mentioned above.

Three separate systems of convoys were run on the line, for the conveyance of personnel and stores along the line: (*a*) the speedy mechanical transport convoys corresponding to mail trains on a railway; (*b*) what we called "connecting convoys," composed of organized animal transport, working to fixed timings and corresponding to passenger trains on a railway; and (*c*) the "subsidiary convoys" composed of contractors' transport carrying stores on weight-mileage rates, not working to fixed dates and corresponding to goods trains on a railway.

The mechanical transport convoys ran three times a week between Duzdab and Hurmukh, returning to Duzdab the same day. This service was maintained by a section of 30 cwt. lorries of various patterns running on pneumatic tyres. These light lorries are, in my opinion, the most efficient form of mechanical transport for a country like East Persia. Running as they do on pneumatic tyres they can use unmetalled roads without damaging them, and their petrol consumption is low in comparison to the load they carry, and compares well in this respect with Ford vans. We had, unfortunately, not enough of them to work more than this short section, and those we had were very old.

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I endeavoured, without success, to get their numbers increased.

From Hurmukh, a Ford van convoy ran twice a week to Safadawa, the half-way point, 75 miles, to Shusp, meeting a similar convoy coming on the same days from Shusp, exchanging loads and returning the following day. From Shusp a bi-weekly Ford van convoy ran to and from Birjand, 102 miles, breaking the journey for the night at Sarbisheh, half-way. From Birjand, a weekly Ford van convoy left every Monday for Meshed, arriving there the following Saturday and returning from Meshed the following Monday. Owing to the distance these convoys had to work over, three convoys were kept in commission for this service. The convoy that arrived at Birjand from Meshed one Saturday had a rest of eight days in the workshops for overhaul before starting on another trip to Meshed the following Monday week. Each convoy, on whatever part of the line working, was organized as a unit under a British N.C.O. who was a mechanic and who himself drove a break-down van with spares and tools at the tail of his convoy. A rigid adherence to this convoy system was the only way of keeping vehicles efficient. There was naturally a great demand by individual officers for Ford vans or cars to enable them to get about their sections or areas. The demand was one that it was difficult to refuse, as officers could hardly look after their sections properly without means of getting about,

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but detaching individual vans in this manner invariably resulted in the van, after a few days, being left a derelict somewhere, having to be replaced and special arrangements made to retrieve it. The trouble was largely due to the native drivers who had been enlisted in large numbers during the war and had not been properly trained. They were consequently incapable of looking after a vehicle on detached service, and needed the constant supervising eye of a British mechanic, which they only got while working on convoy. Eventually the wastage due to these detached service vans became so bad that they had to be stopped altogether, and seats were reserved in all regular convoys for section officers wanting to get about their sections.

Mention must be made here of Sergeant Perry, known among his comrades as "Old Bill" from his extraordinary resemblance to Bairnsfather's celebrated character. Old Bill was a perfect wonder in the mechanic line, and was a familiar figure in East Persia, being generally seen sailing along on some fearsome piece of wreckage he had collected from the roadside and galvanized into life in a way that only he seemed able to do. I am sure all who knew him will join in the hope that he has found a comfortable billet in civil life where he can utilize his talents with profit to himself and advantage to his employer.

The total amount of mechanical transport that was allotted to us in East Persia was not great and

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the carrying capacity of motor transport convoys therefore limited. Carriage on such convoys had to be restricted to the mails and such passengers and stores of urgency as were specially ordered to be so dispatched. Where the capacity of a convoy was not fully taken up with these, administrative commandants filled up with stores or passengers at their discretion as far as the next section. Baggage with motor convoys had, of course, to be strictly limited, and one ingenious officer, travelling down the line from Meshed, on being told that his kit was in excess of the stipulated amount, packed the balance into small parcels which he sent and paid for, by post, addressed to himself at railhead, thereby ensuring its conveyance by the same convoy and meeting him at railhead. The parcels post grew to great dimensions, and by the time I left East Persia often absorbed the entire carrying power of motor convoys. As it was a great boon to the force to be able to get parcels rapidly and safely from India, every effort was made to ensure the motor convoys being capable of carrying it, but at times it was necessary to clear accumulations of parcel bags by sending some of the heavier ones, over some stages, by camel convoy.

The bulk of the work of conveying troops and stores along the line was done by what were known as "connecting convoys." The nucleus of each connecting convoy was two or more troops of a regular camel corps, with generally some hired and

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temporarily organized transport attached. As in the case of the motor convoys, each convoy was regarded as a unit, with its own proportion of native officers and N.C.O.'s, and did its turn of rest and grazing as a whole at the head-quarters of the section after return from each round trip to the next section. The different convoys of the same section of the line were furnished from the same camel corps, whose commandant had his head-quarters at the head-quarters of that section and was usually the transport officer of the section. A regular time table was published and adhered to, the date of arrival at section head-quarters of a connecting convoy from one direction being two days before the scheduled date of departure of the next connecting convoy onwards, thus giving troops marching with the convoy their regular day of rest at places where they could get most benefit from such rest, viz. the head-quarter post of the section. As the connecting convoy programme fitted together all along the line, it was of the greatest importance that there should be no dislocation which would react along the whole line. In order that the scheduled dates of arrival and departure at the different posts and stages should be on the same dates in each month, the time table was calculated on a 30-day month, the 31st when occurring being regarded as an extra day of rest. There was also in each section one short march which could be doubled up if necessary, and by this means time

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lost owing to any accident (or the exceptional case of February) could be made up without dislocating the service. The instructions issued were that if the skies fell, still the connecting convoys must march to time. When the whole marching distance from railhead to Meshed was a matter of two months, the importance of this will be realized. The size of the connecting convoys was based on the tonnage required for the standard weekly flow of stores and supplies from section to section, previously referred to, plus a margin to allow for the detachments or details of troops who were always on the move and for such extras as might be needed. The tonnage of each convoy was allotted by the administrative commandant of the section, the "booking office." When larger bodies of troops were moving, in order that the standard flow of supplies might not be interrupted, either an additional flow of supplies was sent the week before, or additional hired local transport was attached to the connecting convoy.

Our third system of convoys were the "subsidiary" maundage ones, or our slow "goods trains." Goods were handed over to the contractor to convey to the next section on his own transport in, within limits, his own time, and carriage was paid for by weight. These convoys generally carried stores such as ordnance articles and clothing which did not come in a regular flow, or for shifting local supplies such as grain and fodder which came in greater quantities at certain periods, e.g. after the

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harvest, or for making good undue depletions at any particular depot beyond the capacity of the connecting convoys to adjust. They were, of course, largely made use of to stock depots in the first instance up to the standard. These subsidiary convoys were a necessary evil, but an evil for all that. They hardly ever produced their goods within the stipulated time, and at one time there was a bad epidemic of thieving. Owing to the cessation of trade with Russia, due to the revolution and the advent of Bolshevik power, East Persia was crying out for articles, such as boots and clothing, which were formerly obtained from Russia, and with the approach of winter almost any price would be paid for these commodities. It was no deterrent to make the contractor pay the Government value of the articles that were stolen. A large profit could be made by thieving and paying up for the deficient goods. Even at five times the Government price, thieving paid. The articles were, however, wanted for our own troops, and it was little consolation that Government recovered from the contractors the value, or more than the value, of the stolen goods. It was not till drastic measures were taken that the thieving nuisance abated, but it was never entirely cured on these contractors' convoys.

The policy of the Indian Government in organizing and maintaining regular corps of transport has, I believe, been criticized on the score of expense, but the benefits derived therefrom on service were

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very forcibly brought home to us in East Persia. The contrast was most striking between the work done by connecting convoys composed of such organized transport with properly disciplined personnel, working regularly to time and no thieving, and the trouble we had with the scallywag transport of the contractors.

Mention must be made of transport to meet the needs of the defence troops. As these consisted for the most part of detachments which were located at posts that were the head-quarters of sections, and where there would always be one camel convoy off duty doing its period of rest, it was considered unnecessary to lock up specially any camel transport for such troops. The troops had their first-line mules permanently with them, and in an emergency camels from the resting convoy could be drawn on. This was, of course, while conditions were normal in East Persia, and the only objective of such defence troops were occasional raiders or enemy agents to be hunted for. When the Afghan War of 1919 broke out conditions were, of course, different, and the larger movable columns that had to be located at danger points were fully equipped with their complete transport.

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CHAPTER VIII

GENERAL ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

Simultaneously with consideration of the road-making and transportation problems dealt with in the preceding chapters had to be undertaken the general administrative organization of the line, in a way the most important of all as it was the framework into which all else would have to fit. In the instructions issued to me at Simla, on which the line of communications were constituted, a division of the line into four sections had evidently been contemplated, for four Administrative Commandants had been allotted to me. Our initial sub-division of the line was therefore into four sections: the southern from Juzakh to Hurmukh, 100 miles; the south central from Hurmukh to Shusp, 150 miles; the north central from Shusp to Qain, 170 miles; and the northern from Qain to Meshed, 250 miles. These corresponded to General Dale's divisions for defence purposes, as under normal circumstances administrative divisions should do. Under the original instructions referred to, it was laid down that the line of communications should end at Meshed,

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inclusive for administration and exclusive for defence purposes. Meshed and beyond were under General Malleson. As, however, the greater part of General Malleson's force was in Transcaspia, this meant his having to maintain another line of communications from Meshed to Askhabad. As it was obviously simpler to have the same communication organization running through to Askhabad, General Malleson asked that this might be done. In view of this extension, and also of the fact that two of our sections were unduly long and unwieldy to manage, I asked and obtained sanction to increase the number of sections to seven. The line was then organized into the following, which was its final form :—

No. of Section.	Area.	Distance in miles.	Head-quarters.	Subsidiary posts.
1st	Meshed to Askhabad	170	Meshed	Kuchan
2nd	Turbat to Meshed	90	Turbat	—
3rd	Qain to Turbat	160	Qain	Jumin
4th	Birjand to Qain	67	Birjand	—
5th	Shusp to Birjand	102	Shusp	—
6th	Hurmukh to Shusp	150	Hurmukh	Safadawa
7th	Juzakh and Duzdab to Hurmukh	100 and 36	Juzakh and Duzdab	—

It will be observed that the head-quarters of each section was at its southern end, the advantage of which is obvious in connection with the arrangements described in the last chapter for the flow of supplies from section to section along the line and

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for the working of the transport on a sectional basis. The head-quarters of the I.G.C. were at Birjand, approximately the central point. The general organization is shown on the Plan at the end of the volume.

In one respect our organization in East Persia differed radically from what is usually seen on a line of communications. Ordinarily the arrangement is a series of posts, the Administrative Commandant at each of which is the disciplinary, and often also the defence, authority at that post and, in a general way, half-way to the next post, but he has little or nothing to do with the passage of supplies or movements of transport, which is entirely regulated from line of communication head-quarters, and the supply, transport, medical, engineer, and other officers at the posts hold positions independent or quasi-independent of the Administrative Commandant. Now, in the case of a long line such as we had in East Persia, stretching as it would have, if laid across the map of Europe, from Boulogne to Vienna, a much greater measure of decentralization and decontrol appeared to me essential if smooth and efficient working was to be secured. My aim was to make each section a replica of the whole line of communications, the Administrative Commandant holding, as far as his own section was concerned, a position analogous to that of the I.G.C. in respect of the whole line. The Administrative Commandant was to be the head of his section and of all services in the section, in

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all respects. There was to be in each section a supply, a transport, a medical and an engineer officer, the heads of their respective services in the section, under the Administrative Commandant. When I propounded these views at a meeting of the heads of the different services which I held immediately on arrival at Birjand, there was some shaking of heads. Fears were expressed that there might be interference on the part of the Administrative Commandant with the working of the services, detrimental to those services. I pointed out that what was proposed was only analogous to what actually existed at that time throughout India, where divisional areas were subdivided into brigade areas, in which the brigade commander was responsible for all services in his area, having heads of those services under him, the whole being under the divisional commander with his divisional heads of services. Following the analogy the heads of services at line of communication head-quarters would issue instructions connected with their services to Administrative Commandants of sections, except in purely routine or technical matters, when they would address the sectional heads of their services direct. By dealing in this way with Administrative Commandants, as responsible heads of the different sections, the work of the different services, so far from being hindered, ought to be facilitated, as the weight of the Administrative Commandant would be added to that of the local head of the particular service in

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carrying out instructions issued. Looked at in this way the doubts melted away and the standing orders issued for working the line were based on the above principles, and I have little hesitation in saying that it tended very greatly to the smooth and efficient working of the line. In the first place, there was in each section one officer who was, without any qualifying adjectives, the accepted and undisputed head of affairs in that section. One result was that a number of local matters which constantly came up, as they must always do in such circumstances, were settled on the spot without that reference to head-quarters and consequent congestion of the telegraph line that would have been inevitable under the normal system. Further, co-ordination of work between the different services, an essential to smooth running, was facilitated. And, almost the most important of all, it enabled the Administrative Commandant to take unquestioned control of the "booking office" as regards the transport. The carrying capacity of every convoy was distributed by him. As has been described in the last chapter, the standard stocks to be maintained at the different posts and the standard flow of supplies along the line were fixed by head-quarters, but modifications due to calls from adjoining sections and utilization of carrying power above that needed for the normal flow were settled locally.

Under the Administrative Commandant were the local heads of the different services in the section.

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The senior transport officer of the section, known as the "T.O.S.," and who was usually the commandant of an organized transport corps located in the section, commanded all the animal transport, Government or hired, working in the section, and regulated contractors' maundage convoys.

In those sections where mechanical transport was permanently located, and in which the different series of M.T. convoys had their bases, the senior M.T. officer occupied a similar position as regards the mechanical transport.

The senior supply officer in the section, known as the "S.O.S.," had similarly, under the Administrative Commandant, charge of all matters connected with supplies. It was part of his duty to exploit local resources to the fullest possible extent. Where, as in the case of the northerly sections, local resources were in excess of the needs of his own section, the surplus was passed down on empty returning transport to destinations indicated by head-quarters.

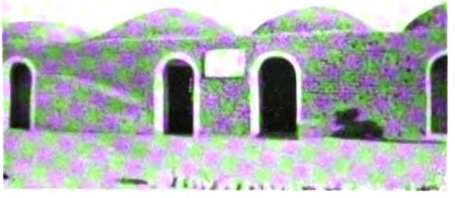
The Ordnance Service had no direct representatives in the sections, and this function was undertaken by the S.O.S., on behalf of the Assistant Director of Ordnance Services, a subdivision of each supply depot being allotted to Ordnance stores.

In a similar manner the section engineer had charge of all roads and buildings in the section, while the senior medical officer in the section, besides charge of his own hospital or unit, exercised control over all

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Quarter Guard, 98th Infantry, Birjand.



Officers' Huts, Birjand.

Hutted Encampments, East Persia.



The Author and Staff on Tour.

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the medical and sanitation arrangements throughout the section.

In the majority of the sections there was only one garrisoned post, at which there were huts or billets for the troops, a depot for supplies and a hospital, located at the head-quarters of the section. At the intermediate stages there were only selected camping grounds, with suitable water and other arrangements, dumps of grain and fodder, and in some cases a serai, in charge of caretakers. In the case of the 1st, 3rd, and 6th sections, which were 150 miles or more in length, there was an intermediate garrisoned post on a smaller scale provided, as in the case of the head-quarter posts, with supply depot, hospital, etc. The connecting convoy time table was worked out so that the periodical days' halts occurred only where there were posts and where the days' rest could be utilized in making good deficiencies of clothing, etc., and where there was a properly equipped hospital.

Mention must now be made of Seistan in relation to the line of communications. In the general description of the country in Chapter I it was stated that Seistan is really a fertile oasis, situated on the east of the Hamun Lakes, in the midst of otherwise desert and inhospitable country. A reference to the Plan will show that it lay well to the east and off our main line of communication between railhead and Meshed. It would therefore have been, so to speak, out of our sphere but for its productivity,

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which brought it very much into our orbit. The great bulk of the supplies needed by a military force consist of what may be termed agricultural produce, that is grain from which to make flour or bread for men, meat for men, and grain and fodder for animals. In a rich country where these commodities are obtainable locally the supplying of a force is simple and comparatively cheap. In a barren country where they are scarce the supply difficulties mount up enormously, while the cost of transporting such bulky commodities from other localities speedily assumes prodigious dimensions. The southern part of the line from Duzdab to Shusp was practically a desert, the central from Shusp to Qain had very little in excess of the needs of its own population, and it was not till Khorasan was reached in the north that these bulky articles could be obtained freely locally. Seistan fortunately lay on the flank of what may be termed the most "supply-less" part of the line, and but for its produce it is difficult to see how the line could have been run at all. Seistan poured its agricultural produce on to three points of the line —Shusp, Safadawa and Hurmukh. From Shusp the supplies went to Birjand, and from Shusp and Safadawa it was "back-loaded" on empty returning transport to the dumps at the different intervening stages. Seistan thus fed and maintained the southern and most barren half of the line, great parts of which lay in uninhabited desert. From Birjand northwards to Jumin we relied on grain and fodder

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brought back on empty returning transport from Khorasan, but for the barren 300-mile southern half we were almost entirely dependent on Seistan, though a good deal was sent by rail from India to Duzdab.

But that Seistan was able to do so much for us we had to thank Mr. Gould, the British Consul in Seistan, who worked indefatigably in encouraging production, in collecting the produce and having it transported to the line. It is no exaggeration to say that but for Mr. Gould's efforts we should have been on more than one occasion perilously near an absolute break-down. Gould not only arranged contracts with the cultivators for their surplus produce, but also arranged to take over Persian Government grain. In Persia the bulk of the land revenue is paid by agriculturists in kind, and the Government often has difficulty in converting it into cash. Gould arranged to take over this revenue grain on the spot, the Persian Government being paid for it in cash at Tehran, an arrangement that was of great mutual convenience to us and to the Persian Government. He was continually going round the province exploiting every possible means of augmenting the supply, while his knowledge of and influence over the trading classes enabled very satisfactory arrangements to be made for getting it to the line, with the minimum of trouble to us.

On the Plan at the end of the volume are shown, graphically, our general system of supply on the line, and the manner in which fertile areas were made

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to supply the non-fertile parts by "side-loading" or "back-loading," the aim being to avoid any of the transport working upwards on the main line having to use part of their own "WTM." in carrying food for themselves, an arrangement which, when feasible, results in considerable economy in the numbers of such transport.

As regards medical arrangements, India provided us with a superabundance of all that was needful. It was, in fact, the one service in which there was no brickmaking without straw to be done. Anything suggested arrived at railhead by return of post, so to speak, and arrived in profusion. On my first tour down the line to railhead, then still at Juzakh, I was shown by the bewildered Administrative Commandant an enormous mass of stuff, the equipment of a general hospital that was to go to Meshed and Askhabad. To have sent all this up as it was, even if feasible at all, which was doubtful, for much of it was beyond the power of camels to carry, would have meant closing down every other form of energy for a considerable period. I went into the matter with the medical officer commanding the hospital, who fully realized our difficulties, and it was arranged that he should divide the mass into three portions, what was indispensable in the first instance, what could follow by degrees as conveyance was available, and what he could do without altogether. In the last category were an enormous number of iron bedsteads, in themselves several convoy loads. At Meshed or

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Askhabad he would have no difficulty in getting bedsteads made up. The elimination of this item and articles such as large wooden cupboards eased the proposition, and the remainder and essential part of the equipment in due course arrived at its destination. Incidentally the cupboards and bedsteads came in very handy for the personnel and depots at railhead base. Another general hospital was sent to us for the line which we established at Shusp, our sanatorium, while a series of staging section units were sent which formed hospitals at the different posts along the line. We were well provided for any eventuality in the medical line.

I was joined, a few days after my arrival at Birjand, by Colonel Boulton, I.M.S., who had been appointed Assistant Director of Medical Services on the line. Boulton and I were old friends, having served together some years before on the Indian frontier at Bannu, where he had been medical officer of the 31st Punjabis, and I, brigade major. I was very fortunate in having Boulton as head of the medical service, for, in addition to being an expert in his own line, he appreciated the difficulties we laboured under in East Persia in a way that I fear a good many medical officers would not have done when carried away by zeal for their own service. Boulton, I knew, always weighed the desirable against the feasible, and whenever he said he wanted a thing, I had no hesitation in giving orders that he was to have it. We were fortunate also in having

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as our chief sanitary officer an enthusiast in Captain Harold, R.A.M.C. How he traced the Miani bug to its lair as the cause of the curious relapsing fever that had troubled us has already been told.

Mention must now be made of a matter which at one time formed the subject of some hostile criticism in the Press: the housing of the troops on the East Persian line of communications. The Indian Government and myself were both put in the stocks for wasting public money on unnecessarily elaborate buildings for accommodating the troops in East Persia. I will endeavour, therefore, briefly to state what the facts were. On my arrival in the country I found the troops and personnel of the services billeted in Persian towns and villages. It is difficult for anyone who has not been there to realize what these places are. Sanitation not only does not exist, it is very much a minus quantity. It is no argument to say that Persians live there all right. They may, but they die off like flies periodically all the same. Eels, they say, get used to skinning, and the human body will, no doubt, in time accustom itself to quenching thirst with sewage. But it needs no argument to prove the fatal nature of such a proceeding to those not used to this form of liquid refreshment. These villages were hotbeds of disease, especially those of the lice-borne order, such as typhus. Other forms of disease, which need not be specified and which are known to be unusually prevalent in Persia, were particularly so in the eastern

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provinces. Soldiers know what mixing up troops and followers with the population in billets in such circumstances means. My medical advisers pointed out with great earnestness what needed but little demonstration, viz. the very serious risks we ran of an outbreak that would have paralysed the whole line, by putting men in such surroundings. They urged shifting them into some sort of huts outside.

There was also another aspect of the case. The population were at the time extremely friendly to us and continued so, but with an inherently fanatical people any small incident was liable at any moment completely to alter this state of things. In the case of a serious rising our posts, including our laboriously collected stocks of supplies, were quite indefensible, scattered about in the middle of towns and villages.

Location in tents outside was impracticable as a permanent measure on account of the cold of winter in the northern part of the line, and the fierce wind, coupled with the heat, of summer in the southern part.

I represented these facts to India, and asked for permission to build hutted encampments of a cheap form away from Persian habitations. The answer I received was neither "Yea" nor "Nay," but both the necessity for economy and my responsibility that nothing went wrong and no "medical scandals" arose was impressed upon me.

I had to shoulder the responsibility. I had a

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consultation with my administrative and medical staff, thought the matter over and decided to put the garrisons of the posts into defensible hutted encampments away from Persian habitations. The mud hut, with the domed roof of mud bricks, of which all the villages were composed, is as simple and cheap a form of hut as can be conceived. At Turbat, where there was stone on the spot, it was cheaper to pick up the stones and make walls of them than to make mud bricks, and in some of the northern parts where poplar was plentiful it was cheaper to make a flat roof of poplar beams than to get gumbazers to dome the huts with mud bricks. But with these exceptions the huts were built entirely of mud and similar to those used by villagers in the country. In the case of the huts intended for British personnel in the southern part of the line, verandas were provided as a protection against the intense heat and glare, but otherwise only hospital buildings had verandas. The insides of these huts were whitewashed, and every effort was made to make them as comfortable for the inmates as possible, but by no stretch of imagination could they be described as palatial barracks, as I believe was done by some critics.

I have often wondered, if nothing had been done for the housing of the troops and a serious outbreak and "medical scandals" had occurred, as would inevitably have been the case, whether those who criticized the building of these huts would not

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have been the first to start a chorus of howls against the " niggardliness " of the Indian Government and its supposed " military incompetence," such as were heard during the troubles in Mesopotamia, and later on again, in 1919, when an outbreak of cholera occurred on the Indian north-west frontier during the late Afghan War.

These hutted encampments were located well away from the nearest Persian village, and where a supply of water could be obtained from the source before it had any chance of being contaminated. They were arranged, together with the depots of stores and supplies, as compact as possible, in the form of rectangles, surrounded by a ditch and a barbed-wire fence, with small defensible bastions at two opposite corners of the rectangle. The latter would, in case of trouble, enable the post to be held with a few rifles or a couple of Lewis guns, thus freeing the bulk of the garrison for active action outside, which, as is well known, is the best form of defence.

Hutted encampments were, of course, erected only at the head-quarters of sections, and in the case of the two long sections at the midway posts of Safadawa and Jumin, where there were garrisons. At the other halting stages on the line there were only the prepared camping grounds where troops bivouacked, but at some of the northern halting stages, where the winter blizzards were productive of frost-bite, a serai was either hired, scraped and disinfected, or a walled enclosure was provided to protect

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halting convoys from the severity of the weather.

A description of the administrative organization of the line would be incomplete without a reference to the financial arrangements. An officer was appointed as Financial Adviser, who was attached to my staff but was independent of it, and who reported direct to the Government of India. His function was a twofold one: to find the wherewithal and to see that proper use was made of it. The first was, at times, a matter of great difficulty. We had the credit, but could not convert it into coin of the realm with which to pay our labour and contractors. The amount of coin in circulation in that part of Persia was presumably sufficient for the place in normal times, but insufficient for operations of the magnitude of those we were conducting. The Financial Adviser got in caravan loads of specie from Tehran and other parts of the country, but after being paid out, instead of circulating back to the bank, it seemed to melt away into the soil. In a country like Persia, in ordinary circumstances, money drawn from the bank to pay for labour, etc., passes from the recipients to merchants for commodities which the former purchase, and from the merchants back to the bank in exchange for foreign drafts with which to import fresh merchandise. The bank can then place it at the disposal of those who can offer in exchange credit abroad against which the bank's foreign drafts can be met. The actual coin is then available to begin going round the circle again. The trouble in East

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Persia was that there seemed to be a hitch in the circle somewhere, the coin did not flow round and come back to the bank freely as it should have done. The hitch was partly stagnation of trade, resulting in the merchants having little to offer to those who got the cash in the first instance. It was also due to the fact that people, after the stormy times they had been through, preferred to put their earnings into stockings against a future rainy day, rather than expend them on merchants' goods. The result was that, though we had the necessary credit in India, the local banks had not the coin to give us in exchange for it. Quantities of coin were imported by the Imperial Bank of Persia in the hopes that the earners' stockings would soon be filled and the rest start circulating back to the bank in the ordinary way again. But the stockings seemed to be of insatiable capacity, and it was some time before this hope was fulfilled. At one time the situation was so serious that a consignment of silver rupees were sent from India. There was some doubt at first whether these would be accepted, but the contrary was found to be the case. They were greedily sought for and were soon passing hands at a considerable premium in the bazaars. The lack of coin was a serious anxiety to us at times. When you are trying to do a job "at once or sooner," and urging every one to tip-top speed, it does not make it easier to have to do it with empty pockets. Still in this, as in other matters, we managed to pull through.

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General Malleson, in Meshed and Transcaspia, was confronted with the same difficulty. In his case the difficulty was likely to have even more serious consequences, as a good deal of political importance depended on his being able to finance his operations properly. He got over his difficulty at one time by issuing printed promissory notes which speedily circulated as money. A Russian officer at Meshed, in speaking to me of conditions in Transcaspia, said that at Askhabad, apart from Bolshevik paper which no one would touch, there were three kinds of paper money in circulation, the first were the old Imperial or "Nicholaieski" roubles which were still accepted, the second were the "Kerenski" roubles which were also good, but the paper money that was most eagerly sought after was the third kind, which he described as "Mallesonski" roubles. One of the periodical financial crises occurred at Birjand shortly after, and as Malleson's notes appeared to be readily accepted everywhere, I wired to General Malleson to ask if he could not send me a supply of Mallesonski roubles, but he was far too wise a financier to run the risks, of which we hear so much nowadays, of "inflating the currency."

I had shortly after this to pass up the line to General Malleson a large consignment of silver rupees, and his manipulation of this silver to the best advantage excited the well-deserved admiration of all who knew the facts locally. I believe I am correct in saying that he succeeded in redeeming the bulk of

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the notes on very favourable terms, and in other ways, like the alchemists of old, turned the silver sent to him into gold, so far as its value in financial transactions was concerned. His skill saved the British Treasury a very considerable sum, a fact for which I doubt if he ever got the full credit that was his due.

Attached to the Financial Adviser in East Persia was a complete audit office for dealing with the accounts of the force. It was located in Birjand and its presence was a great boon. Most officers know the difficulties which result from long delays taking place before arrival of objections to accounts. Had it been necessary to send all the accounts to India, it would have been a considerable period before the objections could have been received, those who submitted the accounts would probably have been moved elsewhere, the situation changed and endless delay would have ensued in getting things adjusted. The presence of an audit office on the spot enabled all accounts to be speedily examined, objected to, and finally adjusted.

As can be imagined, the perennial question of the rate of exchange was a source of difficulty at times. The greatest difficulty arose in connection with the post and telegraph offices. These were military field offices sent from India, and they had to keep their accounts in rupees while the actual coin in circulation was the Persian kran. It was impossible for the postal babus to keep their accounts

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properly when they were paid in a coin the value of which in relation to the rupee fluctuated almost daily. The Financial Adviser, in order to simplify the work of the post office, got the permission of the Government of India to his fixing a special rate of exchange for the post office. He fixed a rate which had effect from the 15th of one month to the 15th of the next, and based it on the average rate of exchange during the 1st to the 30th of the *previous* month. The post office were to accept krans and book them as rupees at this special rate. It happened at this time that the kran took a continuous downward course, so that rupees were cheaper in krans at the post office than at the local bank. Some ingenious individuals discovered that this provided an admirable and simple means of "getting rich quick." They would get money telegraphed from India to the local bank, draw out the sum in krans at, of course, the current rate, and then taking those krans to the post office, with them send back to India by telegraphic money order, an increased number of rupees. Then repeat the process *da capo, ad infinitum*. How long this went on I cannot say, but it was brought to light by the tears of a post office babu. I was going round one of the posts in the northern part of the line and looked in, as usual, at the post office to see if the babu in charge had all he wanted. I found the poor gentleman in a great state of distress. Asking the matter, he pointed to a great pile of money order forms on his table and

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said, " Sir, I am a lone man here. Without assistance I cannot do the work, I will die." I telegraphed what I had seen to the Financial Adviser, who took the necessary steps to put a stop to the process of getting rich quick at the expense of the Indian Government, coupled with the premature dying off of the post office staff.

Exchange is certainly a most mysterious thing to the uninitiated. Who is this great and unseen Being who decrees that the rupee shall be worth so many krans to-day and so many to-morrow ? What is the power which this Being wields whereby its decrees are unhesitatingly obeyed and whereby great earthly authorities like the Government of India submit tamely to being fleeced to humour its whims, as in the case of the money order transactions mentioned ? Possibly in the heart of the City of London there are those who can answer these questions satisfactorily, but I have never found anyone who could give me an explanation that made the matter clear to me. But probably this is due to my own denseness in such matters. Finance, like our friend the camel, appears to be something that one has to be born and bred alongside of, to understand properly, and not having had that advantage myself, the ramifications of exchange have always been a profound mystery to me.

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CHAPTER IX

THE NORTHERN PART OF THE LINE. BIRJAND TO MESHED

In the preceding three chapters have been described in a general manner, the difficulties we had to contend with and how the various problems that presented themselves in connection with organizing the line were solved. But, needless to say, all that is therein described was not effected by a stroke of the pen. The situation had to be studied, one's ideas crystallized, the framework designed, and then a sort of jig-saw puzzle started to get the various pieces to fit into the framework. On my first journey up the line to Birjand, and with the information obtainable on reaching there, it had been possible to design the framework in the rough and start the various pieces moving into their places, but it was not possible to give the final touches to the process till I had been over the whole line to Meshed.

It was necessary to see General Malleson without delay and ascertain exactly what were his present and future wants. With a long line such as we had to deal with, what you put in at one end of

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the pipe would not come out at the other for some two months, it was essential, therefore, to look far ahead if the needs of the force at the front were to be met by a regular and steady flow, the only way of using the pipe without bursting it.

After arrival at Birjand, therefore, I only stayed there the few days needed to start our head-quarters, establish working relations with General Dale and his defence Staff, piece together roughly the frame-work of our new organization, and then trek northwards. Our means of getting about were sadly restricted. Six Hupmobile cars had been allotted for the head-quarters of the East Persia Cordon, and these we took over. But excellent though these cars are and admirable for use in new countries, they yet demand some sort of track to travel over. Use where there is no track at all is rather trying on any self-respecting car, and of the six, two were *hors de combat* with broken back axles, while of the others we had been obliged to leave one behind at Hurmukh, on our way up, with a damaged crown wheel. There were only three cars in commission, one of which I had to leave for General Dale, and all of which had seen considerable service and the health of none of which was too good. I decided, therefore, to proceed accompanied only by Colonel Mark Synge, taking a couple of Ford vans, in addition to the two cars, as a precaution against being stranded on the line in the event of further break-downs. I sent an urgent appeal to India for some more cars

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with British drivers, but it met with but little sympathy, though strongly supported by General Wapshare. If the organization of the line was to be speedily put into working order and kept efficient it was necessary for the Staff and the heads of the different services to be constantly on the move, and running about a country without roads the British driver was essential. The semi-trained or untrained native drivers we had for Ford vans could not keep their vehicles in commission unless working in a convoy under the supervision of a British mechanic, and the six Hups would long ago have been on the scrap heap had we not had British drivers for them. These British drivers were certainly wonders. Apart from their skill in negotiating their vehicles over almost impossible places, their resource in making temporary repairs was extraordinary. If I were asked to say what was the outstanding characteristic of the British soldier, I should unhesitatingly reply that it was contained in the well-known words of the refrain to our famous war-song, "Are we down-hearted? Never!"

Having started the various balls rolling that were to get the organization of the line into the shape described in the preceding chapters, I started off from Birjand for the north, accompanied by Mark Synge, with due preparations for spending nights out "in the blue" should we get stranded, as appeared not unlikely. We did our 67 miles into Qain at an average of 6 miles an hour, well satisfied at

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arriving without mishap considering the country we had gone over. The scenery was mostly barren rocky hills, but the valleys were dotted over with green spots wherever a little water enabled a village or hamlet to grow around it. Qain itself was quite a considerable little town for the Qainat, surrounded by walled gardens and situated on an extensive plateau, lying between hills. North of Qain the high ground drops rapidly towards the tongue of desert separating the Qainat from the Khorasan highland blocks. At Qain we went round the billets in the town and the serai used as a supply depot, and the result was to convince me more than ever of the necessity of getting the troops as soon as possible out of such filthy surroundings. Mark Synge was occupied well into the night trying to instil some of the fundamental rules of the supply service into the temporary officers, who were endeavouring with great zeal but little experience to run the depot. It became almost a regular thing during our earlier tours along the line for Mark Synge to hold kindergarten classes in the evenings for the young supply officers who had been sent to "complete our establishment" in East Persia.

We had cherished fond hopes of getting to Turbat the following day, via Gunabad, but these hopes were not destined to be realized. As this was the route along which our main line of communications was to lie, it required careful examination as we went. We followed the track that had been used by such

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troops as had previously gone north by this route, grateful for the work they had done on bad places and for the little mounds of earth by which they had indicated the direction to be followed. A couple of miles north of Qain, the ground drops steeply from the plateau into a river bed. Descending this river bed for some 10 miles we came out on to the wide plain of *pat*, of which previous mention has been made in describing the road problem. As there had been no rain recently, we crossed this without any mishap beyond a temporary sticking in a soft-bottomed nulla. We then approached a ridge of hills which jutted out like a spur from the Qainat highlands and which had to be crossed to reach the Gunabad plain beyond. The track over this ridge was difficult to negotiate and took us some time, with the result that midday was well past when the Gunabad plain spread itself out before us. Gunabad is the collective name given to a group of a dozen villages spread over this isolated patch of fertility. The numerous streams and cultivated fields were pleasing to the eye after the barrenness of the area we had previously passed through, but were not so pleasing to the springs and tyres of our vehicles. The largest village of the Gunabad group is called Jumin, the residence of the deputy-governor of the district. It was here that we established what became the half-way post between Qain and Turbat, and located there a depot to serve as a collecting centre for supplies obtainable

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A Covered Street, Qain.



Qain, one of the Town Gates.

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from the district for backloading on empty returning transport to places farther south.

Beyond Gunabad to the north begins the tongue of sandy desert dividing the Qainat from Khorasan, and it was necessary to be very careful in following the little indicator mounds left by those who had traversed the route before us. Almost immediately after leaving the cultivated area my car, which was leading, missed the track and was speedily up to the axles in sand. Running the engine and trying to reverse simply sent clouds of sand into the air without moving the vehicle. Digging out a track and spreading it with desert scrub proved unavailing. To use the other car to tow mine out would probably have resulted in both getting stuck. There was nothing for it but resort to solid manual labour. Fortunately we had spied some labourers and a donkey working on the last lot of fields we had left behind us, and these were hailed and induced to come to our aid. The contents of the car were emptied out, the rags off the donkey were laid in the track of the car, the men and the donkey were harnessed to the car, while Mark Synge, the British drivers and I applied pressure to the wheels. As a small boy in Tehran, I had acquired from the servants the correct method of invoking the aid of Ali in cases of difficulty, so when all was ready I started a loud incantation, in orthodox form, to all the saints of the Mohammedan calendar. This received an immediate and vociferous response from

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the Persians, and the car was dragged triumphantly on to terra firma. I remunerated the Persians and was about to return to my car when one of them came up and said, "Sahib, you paid all the others, you did not pay me." I was certain that I had, but, in the relief at having got the car successfully out of the sand, was not disposed to grudge another two-kran piece. I said to the man, however, "Would you swear an oath that you have not been paid?" Lifting his hands and eyes towards heaven, he replied, "Hezar-ta qasm mikhuram" (I would swear a thousand oaths!). He got his coin and went his way rejoicing. The meaning of all this comedy did not come out till some time later when, feeling the evening chill coming on and looking for my greatcoat, I found that favourite and rather treasured article, recently sent to me by Ranken of Simla, had disappeared. Then all was clear. The thousand-oathed gentleman had made his plea as a screen to enable his companions to pinch the greatcoat, which they must have deftly hidden under the rags of the donkey, as we had seen the party go off and there had been no sign of any plunder with them. I mention this case as it was a particularly neat and well stage-managed piece of thieving, even in a country where robbery is brought to a fine art. The loss was in due course reported to the Governor, but nothing was ever seen again of the greatcoat or of its pious purloiner.

It was now hopeless to try and reach Turbat, still

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some 60 miles ahead of us, that day, so we put up in a small hamlet near a village called Amrani, on the edge of the desert. As Amrani had a bad reputation as a haunt of robbers, and having just had some experience of the capacity of the local inhabitants in that line, we took special precautions for our cars and their contents.

Up early the next morning, we had another troublous day on the road. The desert tongue was for the most part fairly good going, but there were depressions where a saltish damp appeared which made the ground soft and very treacherous. After getting into one of these bogs and only getting out again with considerable difficulty, we took the precaution of testing any doubtful-looking reaches on foot before venturing the cars over them. As we moved northwards the Khorasan hills loomed out clearer and clearer. As soon as we left the desert the ground sloped continuously up towards Turbat. The country became greener, villages and water-courses more numerous. In fact the number of the latter made us almost wish for the desert region again as the bridges, such as they were, would not carry a car, and the operation of sloping the banks of a stream and paving the passage with stones became too frequent to be amusing. It was nearly dark when we reached Turbat, and after some hunting found the old Vice-Consulate building which was being used as officers' quarters. Here we had to leave our cars till we returned from Meshed, as

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the road beyond Turbat was not practicable for motor vehicles.

The next day we arranged for a couple of carriages of the Victoria type, each drawn by three horses, to take us to Meshed, meanwhile going round the garrison and depots. Conditions were much the same as at Qain, the personnel and depots being located in any buildings or serais that could be hired, and were dotted about the town. I met Captain Stubbs and received his very careful and painstaking report on the subject of a Turbat–Meshed motor road. I went into all his proposals with him and, having approved them, arranged for him to start work at once on them. Mark Synge held his usual kindergarten classes at the Supply Depot. I paid a visit to the Persian Governor, who took a lively interest in our arrangements for purchasing local supplies, and tried to impress upon me the great advantages that would accrue to us by making all our purchases only through the medium of an honest man like himself, instead of dealing direct with small contractors, who, he said, were sons of hell-burnt fathers[1] of the worst kind. I had in this, as in many similar interviews, to acquire the art of saying the sweetest things without making any remark that could possibly be construed

[1] "Pedar sukhté," literally "burnt father," and by implication "son of a hell-burnt father" is a favourite term of endearment in Persia. Hence an expression often heard, "I'll burn his father for him," or complaints from persons who have been subjected to abuse, that "So-and-so burnt my father."

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into binding myself to do anything or agreeing to anything. The Governor also told me confidentially that he had found in the Turbat district a kind of wood that would not burn, a discovery which he felt sure would revolutionize the house-building trade. He was much exercised as to the money-making value of his discovery, and at first was very chary about giving me details of it. Thinking, however, that I might possibly be a means of his exploiting his discovery, he at last produced a piece of the wonderful material. It certainly interested those of us who were present, for it was undoubtedly a piece of petrified wood. It appeared that in the hills north of Turbat there was a stream issuing from a cave which possessed this property of petrifying wood that was left in contact with it. I was told by an officer who had served many years in Burma that he had come across a similar phenomenon in that country. But I am afraid the commercial possibilities of the Governor's discovery or the prospects of his revolutionizing house-building were not great.

There was still at this time at Turbat a Russian Consul and Vice-Consul, who owed allegiance to the *ancien régime* of Russia, and on whom I paid a formal visit. How these Russian Consuls in various parts of Persia managed to find the funds to carry on with so long after the revolution was a mystery to every one. They spoke of Bolshevism as an illness which had seized Russia and which would

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speedily pass off, a hope which subsequent events have not realized. As our allies, the Russian Consul and the whole Russian colony were on the best of terms with the officers of our post there.

The following morning Mark Synge and I started off in our carriages for Meshed, a two days' journey on the road as it was at this time, but which became a three hours' run in a car when Stubbs had finished with it. We rose steadily towards the first mountain range that had to be crossed by the Khamari pass of evil repute. And we found that it by no means belied its reputation. We had to unload our carriage, take out the horses and man-handle the vehicles over the boulders and round the rocks. A lot of blasting had to be done here before Stubbs got a proper road through it. Our small detachment of sappers could not be everywhere, so Stubbs, ever full of resource, got miners from the turquoise mines of Nishapur, accustomed to using powder, and with these and locally-made powder cut his way through the Khamari and other obstacles that lay on his road to Meshed. Descending the Khamari pass on the north side we came on to the Asadabad plain, some 20 miles across, before the ascent to the next mountain range that had to be crossed was reached. This valley was another stretch of *pat*, passable when dry, a quagmire after rain. There was no getting round it. It had to be crossed, and Stubbs proposed to do so by building a raised embankment and laying the metalling on top of it. I was some-

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what doubtful if such an embankment would stand in wet weather in view of the *pat* soil of which it would be composed, but Stubbs proved to be right. Standing well above the level of the surrounding ground, the wet did not lie on it and it remained firm and hard, even when the surrounding ground after snow became almost a morass. At Asadabad commenced another ascent to a pass, this time for the most part along a broad ravine, presenting serious difficulties only at the top. The descent on the north side was similarly down a ravine, the last part before emerging into the open beyond, being through a gorge with precipitous sides. Situated amidst a cluster of hillocks beyond the gorge was "Robat-i-Safid," the half-way stage to Meshed, where we were to spend the night. Arrived at the village we saw a fine tall man, wearing a huge woolly hat, whom I asked where we could get a room for the night. He replied at once that he would provide one, and took us into an adjoining serai, in the upper apartments of which, overlooking the inner yard, we found two quite respectable rooms. The windows were broken and pasted over with paper, and there were holes in the floor through to the ceiling of the apartment below, which necessitated careful navigation, especially in the dark. But with these trifling exceptions, the accommodation, after what we were becoming used to, was wonderfully good. Our host soon had a fire lit, a carpet spread, a rickety table and two rickety chairs produced, and finally brought

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in a steaming *samovar* filled with boiling water. The *samovar*, a sort of brass kettle, heated by charcoal burning in a cylinder passing vertically through the kettle, is a Russian institution which has been thoroughly naturalized in Persia. A *samovar* of boiling water can be got at any hamlet. It has the advantage that the water is kept continuously on the boil, and tea made fresh as required. We entered into conversation with our interesting-looking host who, in addition to his big woolly headgear, sported on his breast a badge bearing the double-headed eagle of Russia. I asked him if he were a Russian subject. He replied with a toss of his head, "Ah, I am a subject of whoever for the time being exercises authority here." Mark Synge thereupon christened him the "Vicar of Bray," and by this name he was known and remained known to the end. I cannot myself recollect his real name, though of course I knew it at the time, and in my notes and diaries I find no mention of him except as the Vicar of Bray. The Vicar of Bray was a very versatile personage, and of great use to us. He had been employed previously by the Russians in putting up and maintaining this portion of their Meshed–Seistan telegraph line, and it was in virtue of this that he wore the double-headed eagle on his breast. When we took over the telegraph he continued in the same capacity for us. He served Stubbs as a roadmaking overseer and in collecting labour and donkeys for making

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the road. He was the recognized hotel-keeper at Robat-i-Śafid, and not only improved the serai in which we sheltered on our first visit, but himself built another and better one for the accommodation of passengers on the line. He was the caretaker for our supplies at the camping ground. He was retriever-in-chief of derelict motor vehicles and general factotum on the Turbat–Meshed section. He was one of those characters who, while never having a smile on his face, yet seems always surrounded with a halo of cheerfulness which infects all with whom he comes in contact. I said to him, in chaff, on one occasion when passing through, that in view of present circumstances it would be more appropriate if he wore the British arms instead of those of Russia on his manly breast. He merely replied solemnly, " Chashm " (By my eyes be it !). The next time I passed through he proudly displayed the lion and unicorn on his coat where the double-headed eagle had previously been. He had been into Meshed and begged a badge from the Consul-General, quoting my remarks as the reason ! Among the many Persians with whom those of us who served on this part of the line came into contact, there will be few of whom we will retain a more kindly recollection than our versatile friend, the Vicar of Bray.

The next day, after passing over country that almost filled me with despair as to the possibility of ever seeing it traversed by a decent motor road,

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we arrived at Meshed. As we descended the slopes of the last pass leading into the Meshed valley, we were greeted with a sight that has given joy to thousands of pilgrims who annually visit the Holy City, viz. the setting sun lighting up the huge golden dome of the shrine of Imam Reza, one of the most sacred spots of the Shia world. Outside the western gate of the town, there greeted our eyes an almost equally well-known landmark, but one that no doubt inspired different feelings in the many annual visitors to the Holy City, and that was the Execution Ground of Meshed, with its large central gallows, capable of accommodating four patients besides two side arms for extra cases.

Lieut.-Colonel Grey, the British Consul-General, had very kindly invited us to stay with him on our arrival. It was the first of many occasions on which it was my good fortune to enjoy the generous hospitality of a man who it is probably no exaggeration to say was the most popular character, both among his own countrymen and among the Persians, at this time in this area. Among Persians of all classes at Meshed he was respected, and one may almost say beloved. Apart from the direct assistance and advice which, as British Consul-General, he at all times so freely gave us in our task, that task was immensely facilitated by the fact that we all shone to a certain extent in the reflected popularity of our Consul-General. The Briton generally was idealized in the person of Grey. It requires very little imagina-

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British Consulate General, Meshed.



The Public Square, Meshed.

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tion to realize how different our task would have been had there been, instead of Grey, a man as Consul-General to whom the Persians were indifferent or whom they disliked.

The next few days at Meshed were strenuous ones. I called on General Malleson early the next morning and went into the situation with him. My aim, as previously stated, was to ascertain what the needs of his force were, looking well ahead, so as to be able to meet them with a steady and regular flow along the line of communications. But Malleson was himself in considerable difficulties as, in the changing circumstances of the times, he had not been provided with any definite cut-and-dried policy on which he could look any distance ahead. He was, moreover, deficient of a good many things actually needed for current work. He was raising and arming local levies. He was subsidizing and equipping loyal Russian refugees with which to aid the Askhabad Government. Equipment and ammunition was wanting to enable this to be done. Winter clothing was wanted for his own troops. What had to be done was, therefore, to make out two lists of requirements. Firstly, what might be termed an initial list, to make up arrears and put Malleson in possession of what he wanted to carry out what he was undertaking; and, secondly, a recurring list of what he wanted to keep things going when he had all his initial requirements. This we did and I wired off the first list to India with a request the articles

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might be sent urgently to railhead to enable me to get them up as soon as possible. A request was also sent that the additional transport being collected for East Persia might be sent to railhead without delay as the passage of these initial requirements would entail an extra strain on the line. Meshed's recurring requirements I wired to Birjand to be incorporated with those of the line itself, and a regular rate of influx of the different articles needed from India, calculated therefrom.

Another matter of considerable importance, and one on which Mark Synge was busily engaged, was the exploitation of the resources of Khorasan. If the larger force contemplated were to come to North-east Persia, it could only be maintained by obtaining locally the bulky "agricultural produce" portion of the supplies it would need, and arrangements had to be set in train for this to be done. A special officer had been sent from India to carry out local purchases at Meshed, and he and Mark Synge were engaged incessantly in consultations with the Consul-General and in interviews with the leading local merchants and contractors. Apart from the larger possible contingency, supplies had to be arranged locally for Malleson's force and for back-loading on returning convoys to the parts of the line of communications where they were not obtainable on the spot. Mark Synge had a great business brain: economics had been a hobby with him, he had been an instructor and had written a manual for the

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Supply and Transport Corps School in India. He was, therefore, very much the right man in the right place at this moment.

It took us a few days to break the back of what we had to do at Meshed, and then we had to hurry back. We had now the data and information, as accurately as we were likely to get them at the time, on which the necessary orders and instructions for the organization and running of the line could be finally got out, but these could only get their finishing touches at Birjand. The extension of our responsibilities to Askhabad, referred to in the previous chapter, and the subdivision of the line into seven, instead of four, sections, needed a certain rearrangement of our original provisional framework. I was anxious, also, to be at railhead when the stores referred to as Malleson's " initial " requirements arrived, as special arrangements would have to be made to get them up the line without dislocating the regular arrangements for movements which would by then be getting into train.

Our first visit to Meshed had, therefore, to be a hurried one, and we were trekking back south within a few days of arriving. The weather had taken a sudden colder turn before we left Meshed, and Mark Synge had drawn a small bottle of commissariat rum from the depot at Meshed in anticipation of a chilly journey. As a result of a cold blast which greeted us on the first of the passes we crossed, the bottle was produced, together with two tiny

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aluminium cups. At the first taste of the liquid we involuntarily looked at each other. I asked Mark Synge if by any chance furniture polish was amongst the things which he stocked at his depots, but he denied the soft impeachment. The taste had been a bit of a shock to him, but he would not allow that there could be anything wrong with the supplies that came from one of his depots, and showed his faith by continuing to sip at his cup. The contents of mine had already been emptied on the ground. As we proceeded on our journey and further cold blasts of wind caught us from time to time, the bottle was again produced and my companion urged another trial. "The taste was not half so bad when you got used to it," he said. I could only reply that the cold appeared to be the lesser of two evils.

Our return journey by carriage to Turbat was devoid of particular incident till we arrived, at midday on the second day, at a place 22 miles from Turbat, where we stopped for lunch and to rest the horses. Here one of the carriage horses developed alarming signs of colic. This was most serious. We had the awful climb over the Khamari pass before us, and it could not possibly be done with an animal short in one of our teams. The sick horse refused to eat, rolled and lay on the ground. One of our coachmen proceeded to kick it violently in the belly, but this method of cure was mere cruelty and we had to stop it. Our eyes then lighted on the bottle

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of rum. Obviously the very thing! But the taste of commissariat rum proved no more pleasing to the equine than it had been to the human palate, and it was not till Mark Synge had given a demonstration of an improvised twitch made of a handkerchief and a piece of firewood, taught him many years before at a veterinary class in India, that we succeeded in getting the contents of the bottle down the animal's throat. Still it lay and rolled on the ground. One of the coachmen then produced a huge packing needle, the sight of which made Mark Synge frown as he could not but diagnose it as theft from one of his depots. The coachman proceeded to thrust the point violently into the beast's flesh near the root of the tail. This certainly had the effect of making the animal stand up, but the cure was only temporary, and once more it lay down and rolled. Matters were now getting desperate. Unless the beast could be cured speedily there did not seem to be much hope of seeing Turbat that night. The coachman of the second carriage then took off his shoes and, spreading his prayer-mat, commenced to engage in what were evidently earnest supplications to the Almighty. Meanwhile the first coachman brought one of the other horses and, having once again roused the sick animal to a standing position by an application of the packing needle, proceeded to canter off on the other, dragging the sick horse after him. He reappeared in about ten minutes' time with both beasts bathed in

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perspiration, the sick animal apparently cured and displaying a new-found appetite for food. "It is the rum that has done it," said Mark Synge; "it required some time to take effect. Wonderful stuff, that S. and T. rum!" I was not disposed to disagree where its use on animals was concerned. While the horses were being harnessed up, a most interesting discussion took place between the coachmen and Mark Synge, on the respective merits of commissariat rum, trust in the mercy of Allah, and the Indian Government packing needle, as remedies for colic in horses. Where doctors differed so widely, it was difficult for ordinary persons like myself to be wise or to increase their veterinary knowledge. Thanks, however, to one or other, or all combined, of these remedies, we succeeded in reaching Turbat by nightfall.

As we were about to start from Turbat the following morning, we had another contretemps that threatened to cause serious delay. Do what we could, nothing on earth would induce one of our Ford vans to start up. Luckily "Old Bill" happened to be at Turbat at this time, collecting some vans that had broken down in an attempt to get medical stores hurriedly to the force in Transcaspia. He discovered the cause of the unruly behaviour of the Ford van. It had been the practice at this post to use empty petrol drums as water receptacles, and the native driver had filled his petrol tank with water instead of petrol, and his radiator with petrol

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instead of water. To listen to "Old Bill" expressing his candid opinion of native drivers and their ways was an education in the English language. Thanks to him, however, we managed to get off with less delay than might have been anticipated.

On the return journey from Turbat to Qain, we came via Rui Khaf instead of via Gunabad. It was necessary to see this route, and satisfy ourselves that the decision to make the Gunabad route the main line was the right one. This was amply demonstrated. Besides being two marches longer, the difficulties of making a good road and the amount of sand met with were much greater on the Rui Khaf route. We reached Birjand on the third day after leaving Turbat, the only casualty being one of our Ford vans, which the native driver had driven violently into one of the mounds marking the route, had overturned it and broken its radius rod. It had therefore to be left to be retrieved by "Old Bill" on his return journey.

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CHAPTER X

LIFE AND WORK IN EAST PERSIA

On arrival at Birjand on return from our tour north, the finishing touches were given to the organization of the line, standard stocks for the different posts, standard rates of flow of stores, and convoy time tables were made out and issued to the different sections. The task of myself and my staff was thenceforward to see that the system was thoroughly understood and put in practice, and our life consisted, for the most part, of going up and down the line and helping the various pieces of the jig-saw puzzle to fit into their appointed places. And with the zeal and energy which was everywhere displayed this task was very much simplified. The bulk of the officers who were working the line were temporary officers, a great number only recently commissioned with no experience of ordinary military duties, still less of the special ones which work on a line of communications called for. But so long as the heart is in the right place, inexperience is a small matter which is speedily rectified. It is difficult to speak in too high terms of the manner in which, often under conditions of great difficulty, these men put their shoul-

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ders to work that in many cases was absolutely new to them, and different to what they had been accustomed to in civil life. One of our best supply officers was, in normal times, an actor. I was told that his soul was always filled with the spirit of his art, as presumably is the case with most actors, and that the histrionic atmosphere which surrounded him at all times, whether in his depot or in the mess, contributed in no small measure to the cheerful and smooth (generally synonymous with efficient) way things were done by his subordinates and his colleagues. I should much like to have seen this actor-soldier at his dramatic best, but it is one of those things that are denied to persons holding General's rank. I never saw him except as the embodiment of soldierly smartness, and the picture of "Alf" standing to attention as he propounded to me matters connected with his depot would have been a worthy frontispiece to any drill book.

It was on the Administrative Commandants, in their position as my deputies in their respective sections, that I had to rely mainly for the efficient working of the line, and in this respect I was particularly fortunate. Among those who were sent to me, in the first instance, as Administrative Commandants, were three members of the Indian Civil Service who had "joined up" for the war, and no choice could have been more happy. Their previous training in administration was invaluable, and their tact in dealing with Persian officials and other inhabi-

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tants of the country contributed in no small measure to the smooth working of the line. The work that Major Good, with his previous Calcutta Port experience, did as Administrative Commandant of the base section has already been alluded to. But I cannot leave the subject of Administrative Commandants without mention of an officer who seemed to possess a fairy wand for turning chaos into order at a touch. A vacancy as Administrative Commandant having occurred at Turbat, I was instructed from India to fill it by selection from among the officers already on the line. Looking about for someone with any kind of Staff experience, the only person answering to the description appeared to be a cavalry officer whom I had not met personally, but who had attended a class in Staff duties at Cairo. Trusting to luck, Major D. Thomson was directed to proceed to Turbat and take over the section. Visiting Turbat a short time after he had taken charge, I was astonished at the magic change he had wrought in the place. It was the section which for many reasons had worried me the most. Under Thomson's touch it became the one which caused me the least anxiety. A very canny Scot, it was not only in an administrative capacity that his capabilities seemed almost "uncanny." He wielded extraordinary influence amongst the Persians. Turbat had always been rather noted as a hotbed of the extreme democratic and ultra anti-foreign element, sources of potential trouble. These people fed out of Thomson's hand.

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He made a personal friend of the Mujtahed, or High Priest of Turbat, a class of individual who, as those who are acquainted with Persia well know, will not usually walk on the same side of the street as a European if they can help it. It was thanks to Thomson's influence that certain incidents which arose at Turbat, some of which will be mentioned in these pages, passed off harmlessly instead of creating trouble as they might have done. He had a genius for intelligence work, and became later senior General Staff officer in East Persia. When the East Persian Force and the Line of Communications were finally withdrawn in 1921, Thomson remained attached to the Consulate in Seistan for intelligence work. Among the many whose zealous work contributed so much to overcoming our difficulties and whose loyal assistance to myself will always be to me a grateful memory, Thomson must hold a foremost place.

Shortly after return from my first tour to Meshed came the welcome news of the impending arrival of a number of additional officers for the line, the result no doubt of representations made by General Wapshare on our behalf. Among these were several engineer officers, a most valuable reinforcement, for self-sacrificing and valuable as had been the generosity of Mr. Gould, the Consul in Seistan, in placing practically the whole staff of his levy corps at our disposal for roadmaking, we could not trespass indefinitely on such generosity, dislocating as it

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must have been to his own service, nor could we regard it as other than a temporary measure. Not less welcome was the arrival of several officers who had been sent to us from the South Persia Rifles at Shiraz—officers who spoke Persian and who knew the country. The majority of these had crossed Southern Persia from Shiraz to Kerman, and had traversed thence a portion of the Central Persian Desert to East Persia, an adventuresome journey. Among these were my A.Q.M.G., Lieut.-Colonel Williams, a fine soldier who had made his mark during the troubles which occurred in South Persia in the spring of 1918. Williams was not only a master of the Persian language, but he had a deep insight into the subtleties of Persian character. He had a wonderful gift for tracing petty villainies to their source, and the little birds whispered that certain Persian officials in South Persia had viewed Williams' departure with considerable feelings of relief in consequence. The value to me in having as my chief administrative Staff officer one possessed of such gifts will be best appreciated by those who know Persia. I could not help saying to Williams in chaff on one occasion, after he had skilfully unravelled a neat piece of villainy, that, if there were anything in Buddhist theories, he must have spent previous existences on this planet both as a first-class retriever and as a Persian contractor. Another officer who joined me from Shiraz was Major Temple, who was to make his mark afterwards as Vice-Consul

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at Meshed, and more lately as Commercial Secretary to the British Legation at Tehran. I had known Temple previously in India, and when I saw him in charge of a supply depot I realized that a steam hammer was bring used to crack eggs. When I heard that Grey was looking for someone to fill the post of Vice-Consul at Meshed, I transferred Temple to that place and placed his services at the disposal of Grey, in order that the latter might have an opportunity of judging of Temple before making his final recommendations for filling the post. What Temple has since done for British commercial interests in Persia will not soon be forgotten by those who are interested in that country.

And so, as a result of these new arrivals, we were able to plough our way with a lighter heart in East Persia. The transport tangle was straightened out and the organization speedily got into working order and, more quickly than I had hoped for, began to assume that automatic working which had been my aim from the start to bring about. At each tour that I took along the line I found less that needed adjustment or alteration. Administrative Commandants vied with each other in endeavours to make their section the model one of the line, more than justifying the full decentralization and decontrol which was the basis of our working. In going my rounds there were two fundamental precepts which I impressed continually on every one. The first was that section officers were kings in all matters that

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affected their own sections only; they were to act on their own responsibility and could rely on my support even if such actions involved errors of judgment. But though this applied to their own sections, they must allow the skies to fall and the earth open up before they permitted any action of theirs to dislocate the work of another section or the arrangements made for working along the line as a whole. The second was that when an obstacle appeared in one's path, there were four ways of dealing with it, to go round the right, the left, over the top, or to bash through it. What was not admissible was to stand still on the near side.

A point to which both General Dale and I attached much importance was that of maintaining harmonious relations with all classes of Persians. This point had, of course, been impressed upon me before I left Simla. The position of a military force of a belligerent on the soil of a neutral in time of war is, from the point of view of international law, a delicate one. It is only possible at all when that neutral power is in a helpless condition, a fact that does not tend to diminish the grating effect it has on the amour-propre of the people in question. It is justifiable only when it is indispensable to protect oneself from the action of one's enemies on the soil of that neutral country and which that country itself is powerless to prevent. That we had more than ample justification of this nature was indisputable, but, in view of our future relations with Persia, it

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was of utmost importance to diminish, or if possible wholly remove, the grating effect referred to, which the presence of our troops on Persian soil must cause to thinking and patriotic Persians. In the standing orders issued to the line in the joint names of General Dale and myself was an appeal to all ranks to assist us in maintaining cordial and friendly relations with the inhabitants, to remember that Persia was an independent and friendly country, to treat all Persian officials with the courtesy and respect due to their rank, to abstain from any action which might possibly be misconstrued into disrespect for their religion and generally to do all in their power to ensure that, when the time came for the force to leave the country, this should be a matter for regret and not the reverse to the inhabitants. This appeal was loyally responded to, in the letter and the spirit, by all ranks of the force, British and Indian. In the northern half of the line, the only foreigners whom the inhabitants had seen anything of previously had been the Russian soldiery. The memory was not one that they cherished. When our troops first moved northwards to take over the Russian part of the Cordon, which had melted away as a result of the Revolution, they were received with a coldness bordering on hostility. There was a curious custom in this part of the country of speeding the departure of an unwelcome guest by breaking earthenware jugs of water on his road as he leaves. General Dale told me there were numerous cases of this being done as our troops marched out

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of villages on first taking over the Russian part of the line. It was never seen later. I was never able to get a satisfactory explanation of this custom from any of my Persian friends, but it presumably implied that the very water they drank was defiled by the presence of the unwelcome strangers. When the inhabitants saw that our people never took anything without paying for it, never molested anyone, and whose presence was a source of protection and profit to them and not the reverse, their first feeling appears to have been one of astonishment at this new, and to them unconventional, kind of soldiery, but it speedily grew into a genuine respect for our men, and through them for the nation they represented. This feeling was certainly prevalent everywhere in East Persia during the period these pages deal with, and I constantly heard from Persians of all classes expressions of admiration for our troops, British and Indian, and for their conduct and behaviour towards the inhabitants. It was the constant endeavour of General Dale and myself to foster this feeling of friendliness, as looking ahead it might have far-reaching consequences on future relations between India and this part of Persia and on trade and commerce between the two.

During the time I was in East Persia there was only one case of what, in military parlance, is called "an offence against the inhabitants of the country." In this case, rather a bad one I fear, the severe punishment promptly meted out by a Field General

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Court Martial to the offender, who I am glad to say was not a regular soldier but a temporarily enrolled camel attendant, only served, if anything, to enhance the prevailing respect for the even-handedness of British justice and British consideration for the rights of the people of the country.

I gave orders that the Governors of provinces and the chief Persian officials of districts were always to be accorded by the troops the honours which those holding corresponding positions in the British dominions would have been entitled to. I obtained from India and presented to the Shaukat-ul-Mulk, the Governor of the Quainat and Seistan, a large "Visitors' Book," bound in red morocco, with a suitable inscription, such as is seen in the various "Government Houses" in India. All officers on first arriving at Birjand were instructed to call on His Excellency and inscribe their names in this book in the time-honoured manner. This may provoke a smile on the part of the reader, but in Persia such small things count for a good deal. It also served—and this was what I had chiefly in my mind—to impress on officers, and especially those who were new arrivals, what the status of the Shaukat was, and to ensure his always receiving the respect due to his position. The Shaukat remarked to me on one occasion, with much evident earnestness and feeling, how different the British were to the Russians in all that concerned relations with himself and his administration.

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The Shaukat-ul-Mulk,[1] as has already been mentioned, belonged to the family in whom the governorship of the Qainat and Seistan was hereditary. This practice is at variance with that which prevails in most parts of Persia, where governorships are in the gift of the Shah, or since the advent of the constitution, of the Cabinet in power. In a conversation which I had, on one occasion some time later, with a Persian who was an opponent of the new constitutional idea and was an ardent advocate of the old autocracy, he explained to me, in support of his views, that under the old autocratic regime, the aspirant to a provincial governorship had to pay, as was only right and proper, an honorarium to the Shah, proportionate to the size and importance of the governorship he expected to get, and the Shah felt bound, in return, to leave the new Governor sufficiently long in his province to recoup himself before thinking of appointing a successor. The screw could therefore be applied to the population in a

[1] In Persia every one, who is anyone, bears a title in addition to the personal name given him by those who correspond to godfathers and godmothers with us. In the case of the Governor of the Qainat, his personal name, by which he always signed himself, was "Mirza Ibrahim," his title by which he was known and addressed was "Shaukat-ul-Mulk" (the Glory of Dominion). These Persian titles, such as "Glory of Dominion," "Pillar of the State," "Foundation of the Kingdom," etc., may sound fantastic to Western ears, but all human beings are not cast in the same mould, and different countries have their different customs. And after all, "Mirza Ibrahim, Shaukat-ul-Mulk" has its counterpart with us in such expressions as "William, Duke of Blankshire," etc.

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slow, mild and humane manner. Under the constitution things were different. Instead of only one monarch having to be thought of, there would probably be several recipients in the shape of different members of the responsible cabinet, and, moreover, since cabinets had a way of changing with little or no notice, the new Governor could not feel the same security of tenure of his governorship and was consequently compelled to apply extra turns of the screw on the population to ensure recouping himself before the fall of the Cabinet that appointed him resulted in a successor being appointed to fill his post. Constitutional government was therefore decidedly worse than autocracy from the point of view of the people of the country (Q.E.D.). Without wishing to appear in any way as sympathizing with the views expressed by this gentleman, my sympathies as a matter of fact being very much the other way, it must be admitted that there is a great deal to be said, in a country like Persia at the present time, for hereditary governorships, such as that in the Qainat, from the point of view of the inhabitants. Being permanently resident among them, the good will of the people of his province must necessarily be a matter of concern to the Governor, as will also be the general prosperity of the province. As far as one could judge, the Shaukat was distinctly liked by the people of the Qainat. He was certainly very solicitous about everything that affected their well-being. The water supply on which their welfare depended was

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always in his thoughts, and he was anxious to obtain the services of artesian-well experts as a possible means of increasing the water supply of the province.

It has already been mentioned in Chapter V that the Shaukat-ul-Mulk had the reputation of being strongly anti-British in his sentiments. The fact is that he was a man of what may be called pronounced "Nationalist" views, an ardent upholder of the doctrine of "Persia for the Persians," and in consequence he regarded with jealous eyes all foreign activities in his country. To a man of such views and feelings the uninvited presence of foreign troops on the soil of his country could not but be very distasteful, and it is difficult for any Briton who tries to place himself in his shoes not to sympathize with him. Unlike a great many of his class in Persia, the Shaukat was thoroughly honest and straightforward. He looked you straight in the face, did not try to hide his views or disguise the fact that he would be a bitter enemy of anyone engaged in activities detrimental to the independence or interests of his country.

And personally I could not but feel that it was much more satisfactory to deal with a man of this type than with those professed "friends of the foreigner" with which Persia abounds. I heard in Tehran, some time later, a very appropriate expression used to describe all such "Anglophiles," "Russophiles," etc. It was "Pulophile," "pul" being the Persian

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for "money." There was a certain individual in East Persia, who shall be nameless, who was a typical "pulophile." He was busily engaged, during the period these pages deal with, in an attempt to get the Shaukat removed from his governorship and himself installed in his place. On more than one occasion he hinted to me that if he could obtain British assistance in attaining his ends, he would in return place himself entirely at our disposal, do anything we wanted—become our puppet, in fact. One always has to be polite in speech, especially in Persia, but if the gentleman could have read my thoughts he would have been rather astonished.

In time of war it is necessary to make use of spies and "pulophiles," but they are not a class that can be regarded with much esteem. Still less is it wise to place much confidence in them. A man who is not true to his own country is not likely to be true to anything, especially engagements entered into with foreigners.

We had no ulterior secret aims or designs in East Persia. So far as the future was concerned all we hoped for was increased commercial intercourse between that country and India. Any permanent or even prolonged military occupation of the country was the last thing our Government contemplated or wanted. The reason for sending troops there in time of a general war could be explained in a straightforward manner. We had therefore no need for professional "Anglophiles" or "Pulophiles," and I,

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personally, felt it much more satisfactory to discuss matters, when there was any need for it, with an honestly patriotic Persian of Nationalist views, like the Shaukat, than with persons who, though full of outward professions of friendship, regard speech chiefly as a means of hiding thoughts and intentions.

My relations with the Shaukat, as already mentioned, were, to begin with, very cold and formal. But when he became convinced of my sympathy with his views and position, he opened out. We had many frank talks together. He had been removed, earlier in the war, from his governorship for a time by Allied influence on account of his supposed pro-German sympathies and his refusal to assist the Allies in hunting down Germans on Persian territory. Of this event he spoke to me quite frankly. Of the Germans, he said, he knew nothing, and for them he cared less. He was a "pro" nobody at all except pro-Persian. When asked to assist the Allies in hunting down the subjects of a Power with which Persia was not at war, he telegraphed to Tehran and asked for instructions from his Government, and acted on those instructions when they came. He was a subject of the Shah and a subordinate of the Persian Government, and he could do no more and no less. If the same conditions arose again he would do the same again. It is difficult not to sympathize with him.

As a result of our frank interchange of views, an

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ever-increasing personal friendship grew up between us, and he was a man for whom I felt the deepest esteem: a feeling that I think was shared by most of my officers. He was a keen tennis and bridge player, and the hospitality of "Government House" at Birjand was much appreciated by our officers. The pleasure which this friendly intercourse afforded was, I know, reciprocated on his side. He told me once that, surrounded as he was by nothing but relatives who were mostly veiled enemies or subordinates who tired him with their obsequious flattery, it was a great relief to him to have men like our officers to associate with on terms of genuine personal friendship without any political or other forms of *arrière pensée*.

The Shaukat gave me an invitation on one occasion to accompany him on a tour of inspection he was about to make to the villages in the western part of the province adjoining the Central Persian Desert. I was very glad to accept his invitation, as it enabled me to see a part of the area which I had had so far no opportunity of visiting in the ordinary course of my duties. It was a most interesting four days' tour. That part of the country bore evident traces of the Turcoman raids which regularly occurred there not so long before, and the villages were largely laid out with a primary eye to defence. The Shaukat was received everywhere with rejoicings that did not bear any traces of having been artificially stage-managed. One of the most interesting sights we

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witnessed was an old-world custom that had probably come down unchanged from Biblical times, in this hidden-away part of the world. As the Shaukat approached each village, the entire population turned out and advanced towards him and his approaching retinue in a mass. In the centre of the mass of people, borne aloft by sixteen to twenty men, was a wooden platform on which a bullock was tied down by ropes. On the platform stood a man, dressed in red robes, his face smeared with red paint, brandishing a sword. As they approached the Shaukat, the red individual on the platform waved his sword and led a loud sort of poem of praise of the Governor, in which the whole mass of people joined from time to time with varying degrees of loudness. When they reached the Shaukat, the whole body halted with an extra loud shout. The red gentleman on the platform drew a long knife from his belt and placed it against the bullock's throat, looking towards the Governor while he did so. The latter waved his hand, the bullock's life was spared, the platform lowered and the animal released. The Governor then proceeded to the village, surrounded by the inhabitants keeping up shouts of welcome. This performance was repeated with regularity at each village. The Shaukat told me it was an old custom in that province. The inhabitants, in welcoming the Governor, brought with them a bullock to sacrifice in atonement of their misdeeds and shortcomings should the Governor

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have cause to be dissatisfied with them. The latter's refusal of the sacrifice and the release of the bullock indicated that he had nothing against the villagers that needed atonement on their part.

Again, as he entered the threshold of the building where he was to rest or stop, a goat or a sheep was held ready to be sacrificed at the door, in order that the Governor might step over its blood into the building. But this sacrifice was also waved aside by him on every occasion when I was with him, and the animal released. Another custom which we saw repeated at every village was typical of the poetical ideas of this very poetical people. As the Governor rode into the village a number of children appeared bearing small trays on which were handfuls of burning grain. These they threw on the path in front of the Governor's horse. The idea was that they owed the grain, on which they depended for life, to the great man who ruled over them, and sacrificed handfuls of it before him in acknowledgment of this fact.

It was like being permitted a peep into the past of hundreds, or perhaps thousands, of years ago to be among this primitive people and see their primitive customs. They all looked supremely happy and cheerful, attending to their flocks, their fields, and their little village industries, in their primitive old-world way. Comparing these people with the sights one has often seen in places that are in the mid-stream of modern civilization and much nearer

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home, one is inclined to wonder whether civilization has really brought to the human race all those blessings it is supposed to have done, and whether life on this planet was not more joyful for the majority of its inhabitants in the old, old days when conditions of life everywhere were more like those which we saw in this remote corner of a remote part of the world.

The Shaukat, like most Persians of Nationalist views, was a very ardent advocate of education as the means of elevating and improving the status of the people, and there was a remarkably good school at Birjand, largely the Shaukat's own creation, and which received considerable pecuniary support from him personally. We were invited to a sort of "speech day," which took place at the annual break-up of the school prior to the vacations which coincided with the Ramzan, the month of fasting in the Mohammedan year. We were asked to pick out pupils from the different classes and to suggest questions to test their knowledge in different subjects. The result astonished most of us. The school was a great tribute to what the Shaukat was doing for his country, and for the province which had the good fortune to possess him as its Governor.

As may be imagined from what has been said above, in the parts of the country where the personal writ of the Shaukat ran, there was not much to be seen of Persian administration as depicted in Morier's famous *Hajji Baba of Ispahan*. But elsewhere we

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often ran up against incidents worthy of the times of that illustrious Persian.

I was touring northwards on one occasion and had arranged to stop the night at Jumin in Gunabad. Pending the completion of the post outside, the garrison and depots were housed, as usual, in serais in the town. The Deputy-Governor of Gunabad had very kindly placed at our disposal, for touring officers, rooms in the " Ark " or citadel, where his own residence was. Entering at the gateway of the Ark, a gruesome sight met us in the courtyard. A wretch had been having a bastinadoing: his feet were all swollen up, and he was scoring the soles of his feet with a penknife, the bleeding caused thereby evidently causing him some relief. In the building above the gateway where the rooms allotted to us were, the different officers of the post had assembled to meet me. Among them was the senior medical officer of the post, a Captain X., of the Indian Medical Service, a Bengali by birth. He seemed a good deal perturbed about something, and eventually it came out. " Sir," he said, " this Governor here is a terrible person. This afternoon he had a man beaten on the feet with sticks by five men at the same time—five men, sir, *five* ! A woman was also brought to him to-day who is accused of adultery. He is going to have her shot—shot, sir, *shot* ! Sir. I must protest ! This Governor is a monster, sir, I must appeal to you to stop him, sir." To this officer, brought up in the midst of what a section

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of the Indian Press never ceases to revile as "the tyranny of British rule in India," this revelation of truly Oriental government appeared to have come as a terrible shock. I told him that much as I sympathized with his feelings, Persia was an independent country, and that, in any case, interference with the civil administration would be a thing quite outside my rôle or my powers. I would, however, be seeing the Governor later, and if an opportunity offered for anything in a legitimate way I would see what I could do. I am afraid some of the officers were inclined chaffingly to suggest to X. that what he had seen that day would probably be a common occurrence all over Bengal when his people got that complete *swaraj*, "self-determination," that they were clamouring for.

In due course I met the Deputy-Governor and received an effusive invitation to dine with him that evening. After dinner over the coffee and cigarettes my host grew confidential. Was I going on to Meshed? Yes. Would I be seeing the Governor-General there? I hoped to have the honour of calling on His Excellency. "Now," said my host, "you know I have done all I can for your people here. I have helped your officers in every way. There is nothing you can ask of me, now or in the future, that I am not ready to do for you." I said that I would certainly let the Consul-General know of the different ways in which he had assisted us. "In return," continued my host, "I beg of you to

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do a small thing for me at Meshed. This deputy-governorship at Gunabad suits me admirably. I have got the hang of the place properly by now and I am doing myself very nicely on it. I am very anxious to stay on. It is customary for the Governor-General to revise the lists of the deputy-governorships at the Nao Roz (New Year) and I am very much afraid I shall lose my billet. Now, if you and the Consul-General were to ask the Governor-General to keep me on, I am sure he could not refuse a request coming from such a quarter." "And," went on my host, "you know that this district had rather a bad reputation for lawless folk. It requires a strong hand to keep it in order. You can assure the Governor-General that he would find it difficult to get another man who would put down crime like I do. Only to-day a miscreant was caught trying to steal a piece of cloth from a merchant's shop. '*Khub chub dadam be-ish*'" (I gave him the stick well), said my host, and the truth of his remark was evident both from what we had seen and from the perturbation of the post medical officer. "Again," he went on, "a man caught his wife misconducting herself. This sort of thing has, of course, to be stopped. I am going to have her shot. I beg of you to mention these cases to the Governor-General as I feel sure he will be pleased. Don't you think so?" This gave me an opportunity to put in a word without interfering in matters outside my sphere. I said I felt sure the Governor-General

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would be gratified to know of the firm hand with which he was ruling the district, but since he asked me my opinion, I felt bound to say that the Governor-General had always struck me as being a man of rather ultra-humane ideas, and it was just possible he might think the death sentence on the lady a trifle on the severe side. "Was that really so?" said my host. So glad he had spoken to me, as he was particularly anxious to gain the Governor-General's entire approval in everything he did. He then discussed various alternative punishments befitting the naughty lady's crime, and finally decided to commute her death sentence to one of having her face blackened all over and being led through the town in this condition seated on the back of an ass facing its tail. I believe this modified sentence was duly carried out the next day. I expect this Deputy-Governor had good cause for anxiety regarding the tenure of his appointment, and his attempt to enlist our aid was a sort of forlorn hope, for I never saw him again. The next time I was at Gunabad I found another Deputy-Governor reigning in his stead.

In judging of Persian Governors and their methods of keeping order, it is not possible to do so by Western standards. Generally speaking, the more primitive a people, the more primitive have to be the methods of keeping order. In this part of the country robbers, recruited no doubt from the Turkoman tribes farther north, were numerous, and severe

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methods were necessary if life and property were to be made reasonably safe. The presence of our troops did a great deal to quiet the country, but from what I heard from Russian officers who had been there before our time, things at times had been pretty bad. A "strong" Governor was a necessity. Many were the tales I heard of the doings of strong Governors, but probably the best was the following, which was related to me by a Russian officer, who said he was present on the occasion. A new Deputy-Governor had been sent to Turbat-i-Haidari, who was determined to put down highway robbery, which was particularly rife at the time. A gang of four robbers had just been caught. The Deputy-Governor sent out invitations to the prominent residents at Turbat, including foreigners, of whom my Russian informant was one. The invitation was, of course, in Persian, but translated into European phraseology and style it would have been of the following form:

The Deputy-Governor of Turbat-i-Haidari

AT HOME

On the Execution Ground on the.....at 4.30 *p.m.*

Hanging and
Throat-cutting. R.S.V.P.

The Deputy-Governor received his guests in a tent where tea was served. There was a band, and a site was also allotted for the general public of

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Turbat, from which a good view could be obtained. The items in the programme provided for the entertainment of his guests consisted of the four robbers mentioned above, one of whom had his throat cut, one was hanged, one was shot, and the fourth was hurled from a height on to some spiky rocks: suitable selections of music being played by the band in the intervals between the different items of the programme. This particular Governor, so the Russian officer informed me, did wonders in the way of putting down lawlessness in the district. Should these pages ever meet the eyes of members of other governments which are troubled with lawlessness, and should it occur to them that the services of this Governor might be of value in their country, it is possible he is still in the land of the living and could be got at, but in any case others of equal genius and originality could easily be found in Persia.

Our tours in the northern half of the line were, as a rule, more productive of incidents worthy of being related in letters home than those in the south. The southern half of the line lay largely in country that was either sparsely 'populated or absolutely desert. Such incidents as occurred there owed their cause to the climate, the wind or the water of the region, rather than to its population. In the north, on the other hand, though the climate in winter certainly did its share in dispelling monotony, as, for example, when Mark Synge arrived at the

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Consulate-General at Meshed from Askhabad in a broken-down Ford car drawn by a tandem team consisting of a bullock, a mule, and an ass, yet in this area the chief source of interest, anxiety, or humour, lay in the larger and more cosmopolitan nature of its population. Meshed, and to a lesser degree Turbat, had amongst its population, besides a considerable number of Russians, a large sprinkling of that curious species of third-class Dago well known in eastern parts of Europe, and whose true nationality and means of livelihood is always a source of curiosity and bewilderment to travellers in that part of the world.

The Russians in these places were apt to be a source of anxiety to us, as having our troops in occupation of the region we became, in a way, responsible for the doings of all Europeans there. And what the Russians did not seem able to realize was that though they had been top dogs in this part of Persia in the days of the Russian Empire, and could do pretty much what they liked and no Persian dared say anything, the situation was entirely different now, with the Tsar gone and the name of a Russia torn with anarchy counting for nothing. The doings of our Russian allies at Turbat on more than one occasion bid fair to be productive of considerable trouble, generally averted thanks to the skilful and tactful handling of the situation by Major Thomson, who commanded the section. One of the most lively of these incidents at Turbat

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occurred on the day that I happened to have arrived there on one of my tours north. I had ridden out with Thomson to see the new hutted encampment, which was then nearly completed. On our return there appeared to be a fearful commotion in the town, and we found our troops out guarding the billets and serais where our men and depots were located. Hurrying in we ascertained what had happened. In the bazaar a Persian mulla had brushed past a Russian woman, who, considering herself insulted, had proceeded to belabour the mulla with a stick. The populace, seeing one of their holy men being beaten by a European, were at once ablaze. Fortunately for the woman, the Karguzar (the local representative of the Persian Foreign Office) was in the vicinity at the time, managed to rescue her from being torn to pieces and succeeded in getting her into his house. Mark Synge, who was in Turbat at the time, hearing what appeared to be a riot in the town, got the troops turned out and surrounded the part of the town where our billets and supplies were. Some cavalry were sent to protect the Karguzar's house, which the mob were trying to break into. When I arrived on the scene with Thomson, the troopers had succeeded in getting the mob away from the immediate vicinity of the Karguzar's house, but they were howling and raging beyond where they were kept back by the cavalrymen, acting with the quiet dignity of policemen in a London crowd.

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One could not but admire and feel a pride in these men, who by their conduct in the place and their relations with the inhabitants had acquired that moral influence which was obviously the chief source of their power in dealing with them. I was taken into his house by the Karguzar and shown a figure huddled up in a corner of one of the inner rooms. She bore signs of the treatment she had received at the hands of the mob, for her dress was torn to rags and she held it together with one of her hands, while with the other she brandished a Browning pistol. I told her that I understood Russian, and she started off in a torrent, chiefly abuse of the Persians in general and the Karguzar in particular, whom she expressed a determination to kill, oblivious apparently of the fact that it was he who had saved her life. She quieted down after a bit, allowed Thomson to relieve her of her Browning, and then, woman-like, burst into a flood of tears. We got her away by a back lane to the old Vice-Consulate, where a room was cleared for her and some of her belongings brought from her own house. It was obvious that her life would no longer be safe in Turbat, and that we should have to get her to Meshed. I arranged with the Karguzar to see a deputation of the holy men of the place, and meanwhile got into communication with the Consul-General at Meshed—the telegraph line having telephones attached to it—and ascertain his views. When the holy men arrived, I expressed my abhor-

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rence of the lady's deed, and informed them that I proposed to remove her from Turbat. I expressed my sympathy for the assaulted mulla. They seemed much relieved at our intention to remove the lady, as they said they could not be answerable for what happened if she remained at Turbat. They suggested a sale of the lady's property and handing over the proceeds of the sale to the assaulted mulla as compensation, but I turned it off by saying that I had the Consul-General's authority to offer a sum of money to the chief mosque in requital of the outrage. Our interview was most friendly, and they went off assuring me that they would go and quiet the populace. When I broke it to the lady that she would have to come to Meshed with us the following morning, at first she flatly refused, and it was not till I had considerably coloured up the intentions of the Turbat population towards herself that she finally consented. When it was dark she was sent with an escort to fetch the belongings she wanted to take with her. A very early start was made the next morning so as to get her away while as few people as possible were about. Whose car was she to go in? A problem. I had with me on this occasion besides, as usual, Mark Synge, one of my cipher officers from Birjand. I personally had no desire for a long drive with this Russian beauty, and it was unanimously agreed that it would not be a good thing for the young cipher officer, so Mark Synge self-sacrificingly stepped into the breach, and

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said that his own white hairs obviously marked him out as the right companion for the lady. There is a popular delusion that community of speech is an indispensable necessity to intercourse between human beings, and that there is solid ground for such a delusion is obvious when we remember the disastrous effect of the confusion of tongues on the building of the Tower of Babel. But that it is a delusion all the same was proved during this journey to Meshed. Mark Synge could speak only English and Hindustani and the Russian lady had nothing but Russian and Persian, and yet, as the former informed me, they carried on an animated and continuous conversation throughout the 90-mile drive to Meshed. The drive completely restored the lady's spirits, and she was quite playful when she bid good-bye to " Papa " (as she called Mark Synge) on being duly handed over at Meshed to the Russian Consul-General, M. Nicholski.

On my return journey, the deputation of holy men at Turbat came to see me and said they wished to express their own thanks and those of the people of the town to the British authorities for so promptly removing the objectionable Russian lady. They also expressed their gratitude for the offer of a donation to the mosque, which, however, they would not accept as what we had done was ample to satisfy both the injured mulla and the feelings of the people of the town. So all was well that ended well, but the incident illustrates the inflammable

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nature of the material we were working amongst. That it ended so well was mainly due to two reasons, the first the excellent relations that Thomson had succeeded in establishing with the people and priesthood of the place, and the second the fact that the Russian Consul at Turbat was absent at the time. The latter would certainly have thrown fuel on to the fire had he been present by attempting to do something which he would have described as vindicating Russian honour, and having no troops of his own to do it with would have tried to badger Thomson into letting him do it with ours.

The mixed nature of the European population in this part of Persia seemed to throw a cosmopolitan colouring over the doings of the community, with the result that much that elsewhere would have been regarded as grotesque was passed over as normal. As an example I would cite the case of a funeral which took place while I was at Meshed on this occasion. The funeral was that of a much-respected old Italian lady who had been a good many years in Meshed, so practically the whole European community attended it. The only clergyman who could officiate at Meshed was a member of the American Medical Mission, so we had the spectacle of an American Presbyterian minister reading the Church of England burial service over the body of a deceased Italian Roman Catholic; while, as if to make assurance doubly sure, some Russian friends of the deceased, armed with long

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sprigs of evergreen, kept sprinkling holy water over the grave during the service, in accordance with the rites of the Russian Orthodox Church. In truth, a veritable tragi-comedy of creeds, but as far as I remember it excited no particular comment at the time. It was all accepted as being in the natural order of things in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the place.

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CHAPTER XI

THE ARMISTICE AND SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS

The collapse of Turkey and the armistice with the Central Powers naturally brought about a great change in the situation in East Persia. The major menace, that of a Turco-German wave rolling eastwards across Persia to Afghanistan and the Indian frontier, disappeared. What was going to happen? Would we pack up our belongings and go home? It was the hope of many, but was not destined to be fulfilled immediately.

We had troops holding the Merv region in conjunction with the Askhabad Russians, against the Bolsheviks who had control of the Central Asian area around Tashkent. The latter were still cut off from direct communications with European Russia, as the Orenburg region through which the railway ran was still in the hands of Cossacks loyal to the old regime. While the Great War was still in progress we had entered into engagements with the Askhabad government by which, in return for their promised assistance in the event of the major menace, the eastward Turco-German wave, we under-

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took to assist them in Transcaspia against their enemies, the Bolsheviks. The most ardent advocates of cut-and-run could hardly wish Great Britain to imitate our late enemies, and regard as scraps of paper engagements solemnly entered into when circumstances reduced the value of those engagements so far as our side only was concerned. We had to do something to fulfil our part of the bargain. And so it was decided that the force in Transcaspia was to remain for the present, and as a corollary to this decision the East Persia line of communications had to remain too.

But a number of modifications naturally took place. The railway was not to be constructed beyond Duzdab. The number of troops to be maintained in Khorasan and Transcaspia was fixed, also the establishments on the line of communications. The functions of defence and administration on the line were to be combined, and as General Dale had had a long spell of duty in East Persia, it was decided to give him a turn of employment back in India and to leave the combined duties in my hands. General Dale left, amidst the regrets of all of us in the country, including Persians and Persian officials. A sterling character such as his, deeply imbued with religious convictions and zeal, had earned, as these qualities always do, the respect of all. The combination of defence and administrative functions enabled the organization of the line to be somewhat simplified. Administrative Commandants became responsible

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for the defence of their sections in addition to their other duties. I also brought in outlying posts, such as that at Rui Khaf, on to the main line, and provided for eventualities by having a small movable column, ready to move out at short notice, at the head-quarters of each section. But the fact that General Dale's and my staffs had worked hand-in-hand, and where the same bodies of troops were affected one set of instructions in our joint names had been issued, enabled the transition to be effected easily and almost imperceptibly. The combination of duties also enabled the staff at the head-quarters of the line to be reduced and other economies effected now that the major menace against which we had been preparing had disappeared. The high pressure at which we had been working could be relaxed somewhat, but all the preparations which have been described were in full swing, most nearly completed, when the relaxation came. But though there was a relaxation in some ways there was not in others. So long as there was a force in Transcaspia dependent on India a properly organized line of communications was a necessity. It has been mentioned that when Dunsterforce retired from Baku to Northern Persia, a portion of the infantry and artillery from it had been sent to join the troops in Transcaspia. These reinforcements had naturally increased the strain on the line: 18-pr. ammunition when carried nearly 800 miles on the backs of camels is a great consumer of WTM.

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But the armistice brought about changes in the situation in Transcaspia. Dunsterforce had reoccupied Baku. The Russian ships in the Caspian, owing allegiance to Denikin and other anti-Bolshevik authorities, under the command of Commodore Norris, had complete control of the Caspian. Free passage across the Caucasus was also now open as a result of the disappearance of the Turks, and Batum was held by a detachment of our troops. In these circumstances it was decided to switch off the operations in Transcaspia from India and base them on Constantinople as being the easier line of supply. The function of the East Persian line of communications became thereafter the supply of the force that was in Khorasan only, besides keeping open the East Persian line in case of an unforeseen turn of events. A large stream of clothing, ammunition, hospital, and other supplies was, however, already in movement along the line for the Transcaspian force, and a great deal of it was well up, not to speak of stores for stocking the line against the larger eventuality we had been preparing for. The bulk of these were now collected in depots, a great part at Meshed, as the best solution for the time being, until it was known what the final turn of events would be. In this way occurred that somewhat large accumulation of ordnance stores and clothing on the line regarding which I had frequently to answer questions from those who did not know, or had forgotten, the circumstances in which the line had been originally organized.

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The switching off of the Transcaspian force from India on to Constantinople was, as can be imagined, a source of some joy to the troops operating in that region. General supplies, field force canteens and all the numerous etcetera which go to alleviate the lot of the soldier on active service, poured in. Comparisons were drawn between their lot when based on Constantinople and on East Persia, much to the disparagement of the latter. A little item which seemed quite to escape the notice of the critics was the fact that they were now supplied by steamers and a railway instead of some 800 miles of road worked chiefly by camels.

But this Utopia for those in Transcaspia had not lasted very long when another change took place. As a result of the armistice, a general shrinkage of military commitments began to take place as soon as it was evident that the armistice was to bear fruit of some permanence. The occupation of the Caucasus and the Caspian were naturally among the first items to catch the eye of those who were wielding the pruning knife. As soon, therefore, as it was felt that we had done enough to requite our obligations to the Askhabad government, and others in this part of the world who had been of assistance to us during the great struggle, a gradual withdrawal began to take place. The British troops in Transcaspia were withdrawn to the Caucasus and Constantinople. The Indian troops in that region were withdrawn to Khorasan, inside the Persian border

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which they continued to guard. The Caspian fleet was handed over to Denikin's officers, and the troops at Baku and in the Caucasus gradually withdrawn: the British to Constantinople, the Indian to North Persia. The Askhabad government, now left on its own, made a stout stand against the Bolsheviks of Central Asia, but the collapse of the Orenburg Cossacks holding the main line between European and Asiatic Russia sealed the fate of the Askhabad Russians. They were slowly driven back on to the Caspian, and the capture of Krasnovodsk, later in 1919, completed their collapse. The Bolsheviks made, however, no attempt to penetrate into North-east Persia, the frontiers of which were guarded by our troops, and that they did not do so is due no doubt to the experience they had already had of opposing those troops.

A good story was told of an incident that occurred at Bajgiran, the frontier post on the Meshed–Askhabad road. It occurred after the Bolsheviks had turned the Mensheviks out of Askhabad and had moved troops up to Bajgiran, where they found one of our detachments on the Persian side of the frontier. The officer commanding the British detachment found the Bolshi force on the opposite side of the frontier increasing daily in numbers, and it looked as if an attack on our detachment was contemplated by the other side. The O.C. got some carpenters to shape a couple of large logs like big guns, painted them black, and during the night mounted them on a

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hillock behind where his detachment was located, neatly placed in some dummy earthworks. The next morning a number of Bolshis were seen looking hard through glasses towards the hillock. By the following day not a Bolshi was left on the Russian side of the frontier!

As a result of the closing-down of the Constantinople line of supply and the withdrawal of the bulk of the Transcaspian force into North-east Persia, the entire supply of these troops, including the levies which had been raised to assist in the defence of Khorasan, now devolved once more on the East Persian line of communications. The stream of stuff flowing through our pipe, which had been partly shut off as the result of the strain taken off it by the Constantinople line, had now to be turned on again. But conditions were very different to what they had been when we first started work on the line. India, as the result of the relaxation produced by the armistice, was able to send us all the straw, in the shape of personnel and materiel, which was needed to make such bricks as were still necessary. The conditions with which we had to deal were better defined, and last, but not least, the "at once or sooner" notice boards could be taken down.

A little difficulty now arose with the British ranks who were serving in East Persia. Though the force in East Persia was composed of Indian troops, there were, as is always the case, a number of British N.C.O.'s and others employed on the mechanical

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transport, the supply, medical, engineer, telegraph, and similar services. In being kept on in East Persia after the armistice with Germany, these men felt, and cannot be blamed for feeling, that they had a double grievance. They had been drawn from their respective callings in civil life as a result of the national emergency caused by the war with Germany. That war being over, if operations were still necessary in East Persia, those operations assumed the character of soldiering in normal times, which was the job of the professional soldier whose trade this sort of thing was. The second grievance was that the men in France were being rapidly demobilized: they were getting home and were taking the pick of the jobs in civil life that were available. Those in East Persia felt that they were in a backwater, were being forgotten, and when eventually they should get home they would find all sources of employment filled up. There was evidently a great deal of rapidly growing discontent. I represented the matter to India, but India was in the same situation. Practically all the British troops at this time in India were on the same footing as those in East Persia. It was no use relieving the men in East Persia by others who would have an equally just grievance in being kept there. India could do nothing in the way of relief until the new peace army which was being raised at home came out. In the meantime it would be impossible to keep things running in East Persia if we were

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deprived of the very essential services those men were performing.

There was nothing for it but to go to the men themselves, have a heart-to-heart talk with them, and appeal to them. I went along the line and assembled the British ranks at each post. I prefaced my remarks by saying that I wished to speak to them, not as the general, but as man to man, and wished to hear anything they had to say in the same spirit. I told them that I realized their grievances and no one sympathized with them more than I did. I read to them portions of telegrams I had sent to India. I explained the situation and asked them to try and place themselves in my shoes as I had endeavoured to place myself in theirs. They might not see the use of keeping a force in this part of the world now that Germany was down. But it was a matter on which we were not competent to judge. Our rulers knew best, and it was up to us to carry out their decisions loyally. I was responsible for the show running in East Persia and I could not do it without them or men like them. There were no men to replace them in India who were not in the same boat as themselves. My instructions were not to let them go till they were replaced, steps to do which as quickly as possible had been taken by the authorities in India. But I was prepared to go to some extent beyond the letter of my instructions and run the risk of censure on their behalf, if in their turn they would play up for me. I would ask them

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each individually to let me know what their particular circumstances were to enable me to judge which were the cases whose return home were most urgent, and I would try by doubling duties and any other means to let these urgent cases get away. It would mean additional work for the others, but I felt sure they would not grudge that on behalf of those of their comrades whose cases were particularly necessitous ones. This appeal met everywhere with an immediate response in the spirit in which it was made. The men individually explained to me their cases fully, a good many saying that in view of what they knew to be more urgent cases of some of their comrades they did not wish to put forward their own claims. I was able by readjustments to release a certain number of men from each section, and these were sent to India for demobilization by the next convoy. As regards the remainder it was a matter of some months before the anticipated reliefs enabled them finally to get away. During this period these men, the majority of them doing extra duties, worked most loyally, and I owe this tribute to a body of men whose conduct on this occasion has only heightened the admiration which those who know them must feel for the British soldier and for the class of the population from which the British soldier is chiefly drawn. I have in the course of my life been brought a good deal in contact with the former, and to some extent with the latter; and it has uniformly been my experience that if you " play up " for them, they

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will more than "play up" for you. Incidentally it makes one wonder; when one reads of industrial disputes and troubles, whether a remedy could not be found in a little more of the "man to man" spirit.

The removal of the "at once or sooner" notices enabled our life; and especially our tours along the line; to assume a less strenuous and more pleasurable form. The flocks of sand grouse and other game on the line had often made me long for the companionship of a gun on these tours: a wish that I felt circumstances now justified me in gratifying. I found that stopping one's car and trying to stalk a flock of these birds when sighted always resulted in their making off, out of shot, as soon as one got out of one's car. As the birds were generally either on or near the road where lay the titbits that had attracted them, a better plan was to get the driver to accelerate as soon as a flock was sighted. Shooting sand grouse from a car as one sped by them at 30 miles an hour was a form of sport that I am sure would have thrilled the most blasé sportsman.

The Shaukat, who was a keen sportsman himself, used often to ask some of us to join him in a shoot in the hills around Birjand, where the *kabk*, or red-legged partridge (the *chikor* of India), was the quarry. But these shoots were remarkable generally more for the novelty of the surroundings and the arrangements than for the size of the bags. The flushing of a covey on the hillside was the signal for letting loose innumer-

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able hawks, the shouting of a crowd of retainers, and the wild cantering up of horsemen in the valley below. These shoots always ended with a sumptuous luncheon, served in a fine tent spread with choice Persian rugs, all sent out by the Shaukat for the occasion.

It was during this period that I accompanied the Shaukat on his visit to the western part of the province, referred to in the previous chapter. Another occasion that afforded much interest, especially to those who were new to Persia, was the festival of the *Nao Roz*, or Persian New Year, March 21. In Persia two calendars are in use. That which is in common use in correspondence and for dating events is the ordinary Mohammedan calendar, based on twelve lunar months, the number of the year being reckoned from the Hejira or Flight of Mohammed. This lunar calendar recedes, of course, each year, the month that occurs in midsummer one year being found in midwinter some years later. The other calendar is based on the solar year and commences at the spring equinox, March 21. It is the first day of this solar year that constitutes the great festival of the *Nao Roz*. Though the solar year is also divided into twelve months, the solar dates are not much seen or heard of, with of course the notable exception of the *Nao Roz*. Solar months are, however, used for keeping official accounts and for budget purposes.

On the *Nao Roz*, it is the custom for Persian

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officials to receive ceremonial visits of congratulation. Accompanied by my staff I paid the orthodox visit on the Shaukat, who received us in a splendid array of uniform and orders. We also visited other leading members of the Persian administration. Times were arranged beforehand during which the Shaukat received our officers so as not to clash with the deputations of the various classes of the Persian community which it was customary for him to receive on this day. The officers at all the different posts along the line were instructed to pay similar visits to the Deputy-Governors or other local representatives of the Persian Government.

Another day of ceremonies was the Shah's birthday, on which I again led a queue of officers to the local Government House to offer our congratulations on the auspicious occasion to the Shah's representative. The Shaukat gave a large dinner party on this occasion. The table was laid in the garden amidst a perfect sea of magnificent Persian rugs: the garden was lit with innumerable lamps, the reflection of which was very effective in the handsomely tiled tank which is a feature of all Persian gardens. There was also a display of fireworks, without which no Persian festival is complete. Toasts and speeches were *de rigueur*, and the occasion was one for a demonstration of much genuine cordiality between the Persian officials and ourselves.

Among our officers at Birjand we had one who was an Arabic scholar, and he and the Shaukat used

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frequently to converse in the classical language of the East. This officer was, in pre-war times, a member of the Egyptian Civil Service, and his Arabic was the modern colloquial dialect of Egypt, while the Shaukat's knowledge of the language was derived solely from the religious instruction in Arabic which every educated Mohammedan receives. It was therefore as if two foreigners were to converse in English, one of whom had derived his knowledge of the language solely from the Old Testament, while the other had picked up his phrases from conversation with the modern young man and young woman of Britain. But from a spectator's point of view the most interesting thing was to watch the faces of those round about while these conversations were taking place, and to contrast the twinkle of suppressed merriment in the faces of the listening Britons with the awe-struck countenances of the attendant Persians.

The officer referred to was one of those lucky individuals who was not only blessed with a strong sense of humour, but had a gift for adapting it usefully and suitably to the purposes of everyday life. This gift gave him both influence among the Persians and great popularity amongst his countrymen. A tale which was told of him in Egypt is worth relating here. A number of workmen whose labours he was superintending, knowing of the admonition given to all Britons working in Egypt to be careful not to interfere with anything touching the religion of the

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people of the country, determined to take advantage of it. Some of them absented themselves from work. Asked the reason the next day, they said, "Sahib, our hearts were simply burning with the desire to come to work yesterday, but what could we do? God would not let us come! We poor human beings are helpless in face of the Divine Will: we are but as worms in the eyes of the Almighty!" The Britisher replied, "You are quite right. Of course, now I understand. You certainly could not oppose the Divine Will, and doubtless, as you say, you are all in the eyes of the Almighty but worms." They thought this an excellent joke, and more and more of them absented themselves each day, giving the same reason and getting the same answer, till the following Saturday, which was pay day. On this day the Divine Will did not interpose to prevent any of them coming. But the officer said to them, "My friends, my heart was simply burning with joy at the prospect of giving you money to-day, but, alas, what can I do? The Almighty will not let me. You yourselves know well, no one better, how helpless one is in face of the Divine Will." He had no further trouble with them. They had been defeated with their own weapons and respected him accordingly. As can be readily understood, a man like this was of great value to us in Persia.

And thus the time sped. Though many were disappointed at not seeing their happy homes as soon as they had hoped for, yet there was a feeling

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VIEWS OF ASKHABAD—WINTER.

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that if one had to continue serving after the war was over, there were worse places than East Persia, or rather the northern half of it. And so we went on till another cloud rose on the horizon, this time from the east and not the west—the Afghan War.

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CHAPTER XII

THE AFGHAN WAR OF 1919

War with Afghanistan broke out with dramatic suddenness in the spring of 1919. News arrived suddenly of the assassination of the Amir Habibulla, whose fidelity to his treaty obligations during the period of the Great War had been of no small value to us. It was no doubt thanks to him that the hostile agents who had managed to get into Afghanistan had not been able to obtain more tangible results, but they certainly sowed the seeds of which we reaped the crop in the spring of 1919. Shortly after Habibulla's death and the accession of the new Amir, it became evident that the anti-British elements had got the upper hand, and news came of attacks on our Khyber posts and general tribal risings all along the north-west frontier of India. War had definitely broken out with the Afghans. It was not long, however, before the occupation of Dacca, in the north-west, and of Baldok, opposite Chaman, on the Baluchistan side, convinced the Afghans of the futility of continuing hostilities, and they opened negotiations for a truce pending conclusion of a treaty of peace.

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Meanwhile, on the outbreak of the war, stock had to be taken of our position in East Persia. We had a comparatively small force in Khorasan, connected with India by a long and thin line of communications, stretching all round and on the far side of Afghan territory, with the enemy in between. On the remaining, the northern, side of Afghanistan, lay the Bolsheviks, and it was uncertain to what extent, if any, they had instigated the present outbreak and to what extent they were going to support it.

The position of the force in Khorasan, if the Bolsheviks advanced against it from one direction and the Afghans from the other, was one that would require careful handling. An infantry battalion was, fortunately, at this time *en route* to Meshed to relieve the 19th Punjabis, who had had a long spell of duty in East Persia. The 19th stayed on, of course, till the clouds rolled by, the extra battalion affording a welcome reinforcement. An additional battalion and a mountain battery were sent to me to reinforce the troops on the line of communications. There were Afghan troops, of uncertain quality, in Herat in some numbers, and others at Farah and at other points farther down in the south-west angle of Afghanistan abutting on Seistan.

In the new circumstances which had arisen there were two eventualities we had to provide against. Firstly, a direct attack on our posts or troops on

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the line of communications by the Afghans from Herat, or other places in western Afghanistan; and, secondly, raiding on our line and convoys by disorderly elements nearer home, either spontaneously as a result of the existence of our hostilities with the Afghans, or encouraged and aided by the latter.

As regards the former, there appeared to be two possible lines of attack. The desert tongue which separates the Khorasan and Qainat blocks of highlands presented a funnel, so to speak, pointed towards Herat, by which a hostile force at the latter place could easily cut into our line. About the point where the mouth of this funnel touched the Afghan frontier was the entrance to another valley, leading from Herat north-westwards, past Turbat-i-Sheikh Jam, to Meshed. This valley had both water and supplies and would be an easy line of advance for troops. An Afghan force on the frontier at this point would therefore be well placed for either a threat on Meshed via Turbat-i-Sheikh Jam, or to act against our line of communications via the northern or southern edges of the desert tongue that separates the Qainat from Khorasan. This region was obviously, therefore, one where we should have to locate a striking column. The problem was to find a place in it on which to base a column, where the column would find locally the bulky or "agricultural produce" supplies that it would need for itself, and which would also be a good stepping-off place from which to operate, either directly against

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a hostile body trying to move up the funnel against the line of communications, or indirectly to assist General Malleson by threatening the flank or rear of a hostile body trying to advance against him at Meshed via Turbat-i-Sheikh Jam. Such a locality fortunately existed in Rui Khaf, a fertile spot on the northern edge of the desert tongue, north-east of Qain. In speaking of the two alternative routes between Qain and Turbat-i-Haidari, in Chapter VI, it was mentioned that the easterly (the one which was not adopted as the main line of communications) lay through Rui Khaf; also that the Meshed–Seistan telegraph line ran through this point. A column based on Rui Khaf would thus be in touch with both Turbat-i-Haidari and Qain, in telegraphic communication with Meshed and the rest of the line of communications, and it would be 'where supplies could be obtained locally; also where the topography presented no obstacles to its striking either along the "funnel" towards its mouth, or over into the next valley towards Sheikh Jam. This, therefore, was the place on which to base a striking column to meet one possible line of attack.

The other danger point was Seistan, and there was every reason to anticipate that Seistan might act as a lightning conductor to the Afghans in the circumstances in which we now found ourselves. The whole of this fertile area in the middle of a barren neighbourhood was coveted by the Afghans. The dispute between Afghanistan and Persia regarding

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the ownership of this area had been settled by arbitration, Great Britain acting as arbitrator. The British Commission which had settled the boundary had awarded the greater part of Seistan to Persia, but the area allotted to Afghanistan included the whole of the waters of the Helmund above where it entered Persian territory. Though Persia was neutral, the fact that there were British troops (with whom they were at war) on Persian soil would have given the Afghans an excuse to cross the border had they wanted to and if they felt themselves sufficiently strong to seize the coveted district. Even if they did not do this, they might have tried to cut the Helmund and drain away its waters into some such place as the Gaud-i-Zirreh. Seistan was a locality where it behoved us to be able to strike hard if necessary, and it was the second place where we had to locate a striking column.

Between the Rui Khaf valley and Seistan lay the Qainat hills, a rugged mass which extended up to and over the Afghan border. Our main line of communication south of Qain took a westward curve away from the border. It was very improbable that an Afghan force would cross the border into this rugged country, and if they did so there was nothing that they could gain or we could lose by it. The possibility of such action might therefore be neglected. The railway from Duzdab to Quetta, parallel to the southern frontier of Afghanistan, was,

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on the other hand, vulnerable at several points, but the railway part of the communications was directly under the G.O.C. at Quetta, and its protection was arranged for by him. So far as we in East Persia were concerned, the active defence of the line would be adequately provided for if we had striking columns of sufficient strength at Rui Khaf and in Seistan.

"Of sufficient strength." Therein lay the rub. Our entire force on the line of communications, even if concentrated, looked very small on paper compared with what our intelligence reports said were on the other side of the border. In order to make the striking columns of any size at all, every man in the shape of regular troops that could be scraped together on the line was collected to put into them. The garrisons of the posts were pared down to the merest handfuls, and these chiefly of unfit men. I had sore wails from some of the Administrative Commandants, but, as I pointed out to them, if the striking columns were able to do their job, local defence would automatically be all right; if the striking columns were not able to do it owing to our not giving them every man we could, the extra men in local defence would not help the Administrative Commandants much.

I had at this time altogether on the line three squadrons of the 41st Cavalry (one of the extra regiments raised in India during the war by contributions from other regiments), a battalion and a half

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of the 98th Infantry, the 107th Pioneers, and a detachment of sappers and miners. The reinforcements sent consisted of the Kashmir mountain battery and a battalion of Kapurthala infantry. Their distribution prior to the Afghan War was that the 98th furnished the garrisons for the different posts along the line and, together with the cavalry, provided local movable columns for the defence of the different sections, besides a reserve at headquarters at Birjand. The companies of the 107th Pioneers were distributed among the sections of the line. The construction of the road had been finished some time previously, and the duty of these pioneer companies was to move backwards and forwards periodically along the sections of the road they were allotted to, maintaining and improving it where necessary.

In order to form the northern striking column, the whole of the 107th Pioneers were concentrated at Rui Khaf, and, together with a squadron of the 41st Cavalry and a section of the Kashmir mountain battery, formed the fighting strength of this column, the whole under the command of Lieut.-Colonel W. Bickford, C.I.E., D.S.O., Commandant of the 107th. They seemed but a wee body compared with the numbers which our intelligence reported as being at Herat on the other side, but they were composed of fine material and would certainly have given a good account of themselves had the occasion arisen for them to do so. The Afghans did not,

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however, venture to try conclusions with them, thereby no doubt showing their wisdom.

At Seistan, in order to form the second striking column, were concentrated the bulk of the 98th, the other two squadrons of the 41st and the other two sections of the Kashmir mountain battery, as well as, when they arrived, the Kapurthala infantry, the whole under the command of Lieut.-Colonel W. E. Pye, C.I.E., 98th Infantry. The probability of attack seemed greater in Seistan and the possible consequences of attack more serious: this column was therefore twice the strength of that at Rui Khaf.

The above were, in general, the measures we took in anticipation of the first of the local menaces which the Afghan War brought into prospect, viz. an attack on our line by Afghan troops from over the border. But there was still the second menace to be provided against: that of sporadic raiding of convoys and general activities of the robber fraternity, which it was only reasonable to anticipate would be stimulated by the existence of a state of war with Afghanistan. To meet this I had to rely on the assistance which the Consul-General at Meshed and the Consul in Seistan were able to give me in the shape of their consular levy corps. But for this assistance I could not have combed the line of communications as clean of regular troops as I did, and the striking columns being of lesser strength might not have deterred the Afghans from

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crossing the border to try conclusions with us, as undoubtedly our dispositions did. These consular levy corps, as has been previously mentioned, were composed of men raised locally during the war to assist in capturing hostile agents who were traversing the country. Proving, as they did, their utility in many other ways, they were gradually increased in strength till, at the time we are speaking of, the Seistan Corps numbered some 1,000 men and the Khorasan Corps half that number. They consisted partly of mounted levies, on ponies or camels, and partly of foot levies. From the mounted levies were furnished the escorts which it was now necessary to attach to each of the regular convoys in the different sections; also a mounted movable column at Hurmukh to take the place of the cavalry which had gone to Seistan. The foot levies supplied garrisons at the different posts and guards over our supply dumps and other military property at the camping grounds and serais on the various marching stages, intermediate to the posts. In addition, the levies patrolled the telegraph line where it ran in exposed positions close to the Afghan border. They were of the greatest value to us, not only in the duties they performed directly, but also in the fact that they freed the regulars to form a thick stick that could be displayed in the sight of those watching us from over the border, and the existence of these levy corps was by no means the least of the factors which enabled us to weather

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the crisis of the Afghan War in a situation that was full of disagreeable possibilities.

The outbreak of the Afghan War made it necessary to add a branch motor road from the main line of communications to Seistan, to enable motor ambulances and mechanical transport convoys to reach Seistan in case of necessity. The previous and existing tracks into Seistan could be traversed by an occasional car, if driven by a skilful chauffeur and followed by a prolonged detention in a workshop after each journey. But as the chief function of Seistan hitherto had been, from our point of view, that of a granary, the produce of which travelled on camels, there had not been sufficient reason to justify the expense of making a motor road to this district. The military importance which it assumed as the result of the outbreak of the Afghan War necessitated this defect being rectified without delay. The shortest connection, and the one most easily made, was chosen: that between Safadawa, the half-way post between Hurmukh and Shusp, and Labi Baring, on the shore of the Hamuns, whence the lakes could be crossed where the saucer-like rim of one of the lakes adjoins that of the next, and thence to Nasratabad, the chief town in Seistan.

The work was carried out very speedily and creditably by the 104th Labour Corps, under extremely trying conditions. The *sad-ó-bist* wind was raging in full fury while they were engaged in this work, the heat was intense, and their water, in most

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places where they were working, had to be brought from a distance.

The wind seemed determined to give a special demonstration of its qualities at this time. I went to Seistan to see Colonel Pye's column, which had just been assembled there, and the troops were being paraded in the morning for my inspection. When I looked out in the morning the atmosphere was the colour of pea-soup. I tried to get the parade stopped, but as I found the men had already turned out, I felt it was my duty to go out and share the joys of the wind with them. The parade did not last long, as it was impossible to see anything more than a few feet in front of one, not to speak of the difficulty of moving about in that hurricane. The Kapurthala infantry, on their march to Seistan, had had an unfortunate experience, the result of this wind, which caused some casualties. Owing to the darkness produced by the wind and sand, some stragglers from the regiment lost their way, being only found later in an exhausted condition and after a difficult search by some men of the mounted levies from Seistan.

"'Tis an ill wind that blows no one any good" is a well-known saying, and ill as this particular wind is, Mr. Gould, the Consul in Seistan, certainly succeeded in getting some good out of the demon by making it cool his house. The wind at its entrance was made to pass through wet cloths and other obstacles, which deprived it of its sand and brought

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down its temperature. Its force was then utilized to create a continuous draught along a series of cunningly devised passages through the house. Passing through the building in its cleansed and cooled condition, it was certainly most effective in keeping the inside of the Consulate very cool and pleasant compared with the furnace-like heat outside.

It is a strange thing how people who have to live in evil climates generally end by growing enthusiastic about them. Take, for example, Bombay or Madras. Not that I wish for a moment to do either Bombay or Madras the injustice of comparing their climate with that of Seistan. Far from it. But still, most people who have not been residents in Bombay or Madras will probably agree with me that the atmosphere of those places bears a strong resemblance to that of a Turkish bath, which would be bearable if one could go about dressed *à la* Turkish bath, but which is very irksome when attired in civilized garb. I have visited these towns on different occasions during most months of the year, and have never yet been able to decide which particular month to place at the bottom of the list from the point of view of the pleasure which the climate affords to the visitor. The claims of each month to that honourable place seemed so equal. But I have heard people whose lot was cast in Bombay or Madras simply rave about those places: a paradise on earth; would rather spend their lives there than any place they know of, etc. It appears to be

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a wise law of Nature which makes human beings first grow accustomed to their environment and then fall in love with it.

But however strong this law may be, it was difficult to believe that it could create enthusiasm for a climate that includes among its joys the *sad-o-bist* wind. Yet such appeared to be the case. There were some Europeans in Seistan, old residents, who revelled in the place and who caused a local wit to pen the following new version of an old verse that most of us probably remember from our nursery days:

There is a Happy Land,
Far, far, away!
Where blows the wind and sand
All night and every day;
There dwell some people gay,
Happy all the livelong day,
Never want to go away
From that Happy, Happy Land,
Far, far, away!

But to revert to the Afghans. Though no serious organized attacks were made on our troops from over the border, minor raiding increased considerably during this period of tension. How far this raiding was engineered from over the frontier it is difficult to say, but the line of retreat of the raiders was almost invariably towards the nearest point of the frontier. The raiding was worst in the southern part of the line. Frequent attempts were made on convoys between Duzdab and Hurmukh. An attempt was made to capture the levy post at

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Lutak in Seistan, but met with severe punishment at the hands of the stout-hearted garrison of the post. A bold attempt was made one night on the camel enclosure at Hurmukh, and a number of camels carried off. The raiders were followed up nearly to the Afghan frontier by the mounted levy detachment at the post, and the majority of the stolen camels recovered. Transport bringing supplies from Seistan to the main line, the Persian post and the telegraph line were sampled as subjects for experiments. The local thieving fraternity no doubt took a large part in these incidents, but we soon had reason to suspect that others besides Afghans and professional local robbers were taking a hand in the game. It appeared a strange thing that the raids which occurred on convoys took place almost exclusively on contractors' maundage convoys, that is, caravans conveying stores on weight-distance rates on the contractors' own camels working " on their own." It is true that the regular convoys had escorts, but the escorts were small, the camels much finer, their number greater, and the potential plunder generally of better quality than on the contractors' maundage caravans. It was strange that the regular convoy did not attract, at all events, its share of the attention of the raiders. The maundage contractors complained bitterly of these raiders, ascribing their parentage to dogs and hell-burnt fathers. They were urged to attach their camels to the regular convoys and so obtain

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the benefit of the escorts which marched with the latter. Strange to say, they showed an unaccountable reluctance to do this. Their camel-men were unaccustomed to doing regular marches, they said. They liked to do a bit more here, a bit less there, to stop where there happened to be grazing, and so on. And after each raid they presented bills of increasing size for the camels they had lost, in the wording of their contracts, "through the action of the King's enemies." The stores carried on these camels had, of course, also gone, taken away by these same enemies of the King. Feeling strong suspicions regarding the identity of His Majesty's enemies in these cases, I gave instructions that the contractors were to be warned that, if they declined to take advantage of the protection which sending their camels with regular convoys would give them, no compensation would be paid for any camels lost, and that they would be held responsible for Government stores which disappeared with their camels. Great wailing and gnashing of teeth! How unjust! they said; look at the wording of their contracts! Most of these maundage contractors struck. But the strike came at a time when we could view it with equanimity. We had reached a stage when we were reducing the flow along the line. The reduction, temporarily suspended owing to the extra troops moving as the result of the Afghan War, could be again resumed, and the maundage contractors' unsatisfactory cara-

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vans would be the first form of transportation to be pruned down. Seeing that the strike fell flat, the majority wanted to come back on our terms, but most of them definitely received their *congé*. There was a sudden and remarkable diminution in the apparent number of the King's enemies in that region.

When the Afghans light-heartedly threw down the gauntlet to the British Empire, they evidently laboured under the delusion that they were going to walk easily into Peshawar and other parts of India. Instead of this they found that the British were getting unpleasantly near to Kabul: they therefore asked for a truce. During this truce, until the treaty of peace which was arranged some time afterwards, we remained in an attitude of *qui vive* in East Persia. We perfected our arrangements to meet hostilities should they be resumed, and awaited events.

While, however, we made every preparation to meet an attack from the other side, we were careful to do nothing that could be construed as using the neutral soil of Persia as a stepping-off place for offensive operations against Afghanistan.

The quarrel was between ourselves and the Afghans only, and we had to be careful not to involve Persia in any way, or to cause Persia unnecessary embarrassment as a result of the presence of our troops on her territory.

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CHAPTER XIII

LATER DEVELOPMENTS. DEPARTURE FROM EAST PERSIA

The conditions of preparation and awaiting events described in the last chapter were terminated when news was received of the signature of a treaty of peace with Afghanistan. Our life and routine now returned to the normal grooves in which they had been running prior to the outbreak of the late hostilities. The reinforcements sent to us were returned to India. Our striking columns were broken up, and the troops composing them sent back to the posts and to the duties they had previously been engaged on. The relief of the 19th Punjabis, in the north, which had been delayed, was carried out, a company of the regiment coming down the line with each successive weekly connecting convoy: an arrangement that avoided having to make any special transport arrangements for them. The men had had a long spell in East Persia and Transcaspia and were looking forward to seeing their homes again. In the early days of the Cordon, as during the later fighting in Transcaspia, they had had a strenuous time, and they had throughout upheld

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the best traditions of the Indian Army, and had contributed in no small degree to the respect felt for that army in the regions where they had served.

The Governor, the Shaukat-ul-Mulk, now that things were quieter, announced his intention of carrying out what he had long desired—a pilgrimage to the holy places of his faith—but which, owing to the troublous conditions during the last few years, he had been obliged to defer. He found, however, that a journey to Mecca, which was his original desire, would still be attended with certain difficulties, particularly in the matter of finding suitable accommodation for persons of his rank in such vessels as were at that time sailing to the Red Sea ports. He arranged, therefore, to visit in lieu the Shia holy places in Mesopotamia. To reach these he could count on the assistance of British authorities *en route*. His journey enabled us to do something in return for the hospitality he had shown to our officers in Birjand. I placed the best car I had on the line at his disposal, and arranged a special convoy of Fords to accompany him for his baggage and retinue. I gave instructions that the best accommodation at the different posts was to be reserved for him, guards of honour provided, etc. Similar arrangements were made from Quetta for his train journey from Duzdab to India. Mr. Gould, the Consul in Seistan, arranged a tour in India to enable him to see some of the sights of that country on his return from his pilgrimage and

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before returning to East Persia: arrangements which, I believe, were a source of great gratification to him. He left as his *locum tenens* at Birjand the Mispah Diwan, who had been his second-in-command, so to speak, in the administration of the province. The Mispah Diwan used to be called by the Shaukat, in chaff, the *Nisfi Diwané* (half a lunatic), a play, in Persian, on the words of his title.

I went with my staff to see the Shaukat off on the morning of his departure, and bid good-bye to a man for whom, in common with all my officers, I felt not only the greatest friendship, but the deepest respect. When he returned from his tour I had left East Persia.

Shortly before the Shaukat's departure I received from the British Minister in Tehran a telegram, saying that he had been asked by the Persian Government to convey to me their appreciation of the assistance and cordial co-operation Persian officials had received from us in East Persia. It was particularly gratifying to receive this telegram, showing that the efforts we had been continuously making to maintain friendly relations with the people among whom we were temporarily located had not been in vain.

In August came the news of the conclusion of the Anglo-Persian Agreement, under which British assistance was to be given to Persia to enable her to rise to a position among the nations worthy of her historic past. It seemed to augur the beginning

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of a new era in Anglo-Persian relations. It was certainly received most favourably by the people in *East* Persia. The general tone of comments was that Persia only needed the grasp of a friendly hand to enable her to rise again, and the hand that Persians would appreciate and value most would be that of Britain. That such a general feeling had taken the place of the desire, manifested when our troops first went there, to break water-vessels in the path of unwelcome visitors, was due to the troops, British and Indian, who had been located in East Persia and who, by their scrupulous dealings and conduct, had created a general feeling of friendship and respect for the Empire that they represented.

Under the terms of the Agreement, provision had been made for the appointment of a mixed Anglo-Persian Commission to go into the question of the reorganization of Persia's military forces, and I received, shortly afterwards, a telegram asking if I was willing to be considered for the post of President of the Commission. Born in the country and having spent a great part of my childhood there I had, in a full measure, that affection and enthusiasm for the Persians which those who live among them generally develop for this most fascinating of Eastern peoples. The prospect of revisiting the scenes of my childhood in Tehran, and the possibility of being able to render some service to the country in which I had first seen light, were such that no

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deep pondering was necessary before deciding what reply I should send. I telegraphed gladly an answer in the affirmative. It was not, however, till November, two months later, that I received orders to hand over my charge in East Persia to the next senior officer, pending the arrival of my successor, Brig.-General W. B. Lesslie, and to proceed without delay to Tehran.

I left Birjand on November 25, parting with much regret from my Staff: men who had worked for me as few have the good fortune to be served by their subordinates. The last to say good-bye to me was my companion of many journeys in the country: Colonel Mark Synge. We parted with mutual hopes of a not-too-long-deferred reunion elsewhere, a hope not destined to be realized, and at Golder's Green Cemetery, shortly after my return home in 1921, I paid my last tribute of respect and farewell to one whom I shall always regard as one of my best friends.

The Mispah Diwan, the acting Governor, in the absence of the Shaukat, paid me the compliment of accompanying me on horseback some way out of the town with his full retinue. My journey to Qain was done at an average of 30 miles per hour, a contrast to the 6 miles per hour of my first journey on this stretch the previous year. As reliefs had arrived by this time for our car drivers, the majority had departed for India prior to demobilization. The driver of my car, instead of leaving with his

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comrades, had asked to stay in order to drive me on my final journey to Meshed. It was not the least appreciated of many tokens which I received on my departure, from those who had served under me, of those feelings which form the foundation-stone of "discipline" in its best and truest sense. I stopped at the different posts only long enough to say good-bye to the garrisons and where possible to Persian officials, and arrived at Meshed on the afternoon of the day following my departure from Birjand. Colonel Grey, our hospitable Consul-General, was away at the time, having passed down the line on leave some time before, but Captain Fowle, the acting Consul-General, was determined to maintain the traditions of the house, and I was welcomed "as of old." It took a few days for arrangements to be made for the long carriage drive of 600 miles to Tehran that lay before me, and the time was largely passed in paying farewell visits to the many friends, European and Persian, which it had been my good fortune to make during my tours to the northern part of the line.

My journey to Tehran has nothing to do with East Persia and is, therefore, outside the scope of these sketches, but as it was productive of several incidents typical of travel in the interior of Persia which may be of interest, some of them will be touched on.

In Persia the Post Office acts as a sort of general Carter, Patterson & Co. It maintains lines of post

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houses provided with relays of horses, which, besides serving for the conveyance of mails and parcels, are available for the use of the travelling public. Travellers can either journey at a cheaper rate using the same animals throughout, which means proceeding at a slow rate with prolonged intervals of rest, or *chappar*, at a much higher rate, using the relays of post horses. The Persian *chappar* horse is an object on which travellers in Persia generally have abundant field for exercising their wit, but my own experience on this journey by no means bore out the impression which Persian post horses generally seem to leave in the minds of foreign travellers. I was very much struck at the excellent condition of the horses on this route. They were sleek, well fed and full of spirit. This was all the more surprising as the only fault one had to find was the insufficiency of the number of teams at many of the post houses, a defect which should have implied overwork for the animals, but which their appearance belied.

But if the animals were sleek and well fed, the same could not be said of the vehicles provided by the Post Office Department. I had arranged for a *kaliské*, or closed carriage, a kind of cross between a brougham and the old-fashioned London "growler," but much more of the latter than the former in it, for myself, and a *gari*, or large four-horse wagon, for my servants and kit. To anyone unacquainted with Persia and the guardian angel which seems to

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protect vehicles in that country, the sight of these conveyances which were to do a 600-mile journey would have produced a feeling nothing short of dismay. In any European country they would have been consigned to the scrap heap decades before. There was hardly a piece of metal that had not been patched up more than once with bits of string, hardly a piece of woodwork that, according to our ideas, would have been fit for even firewood. Yet they accomplished their 600-mile bumping in safety, without any accident incapable of being adjusted by recourse to the roll of string carried by every Post Office coachman in Persia.

While I was at Meshed a party arrived who were conducting an experimental trip with commercial lorries which Messrs. Govan Bros., from India, were carrying out with a view to testing the feasibility of establishing a commercial motor service in East Persia. The experiment was watched with much interest by all those on the line, and particularly by Lieut.-Colonel Hutchinson, the Deputy-Assistant Director of Mechanical Transport in East Persia, who had accompanied the party. Hutchinson was an enthusiast in his own line. He had literally "made" the M.T. service in East Persia, and converted a mass of vehicles, once largely scattered as derelicts over the country, into an orderly series of regularly-working convoys.

I left Meshed on December 2 by car as far as Sharifabad, 26 miles, the point where the track to

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Tehran left the motor road of the East Persian line of communications. Hutchinson, who had come with me, took the car back to Meshed. At Sharifabad I joined my cavalcade which had preceded me there, and I then began my jolting westwards to Nishapur, *en route* to Tehran.

On the night of the second day an accident occurred which illustrates the necessity, when travelling in Persia, of reinforcing strongly any metal fastenings on Postal Department vehicles with bands of the indispensable string. The baggage wagon had a folding end to facilitate loading. The chains fastening up this folding end gave way in the night, and the wagon began to shed its contents at intervals along the road, unnoticed by the sleeping servants travelling in the wagon, or by its almost equally somnolent driver. The occurrence was not noticed till the next post house was reached the following morning. The deficiencies consisted of two trunks and a roll of servants' bedding. It was useless to return. It would have involved a long delay, and the articles would by then have probably been appropriated by passing wayfarers. I gave them up as lost, and purchased the largest roll of string the local bazaar could boast of as an insurance against further losses. Telegrams were, however, sent from the next halting-place boasting of a telegraph office to various post houses and to the Governor of the district where the loss had occurred. The missing articles, much to my surprise, turned

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up about ten days after my arrival at Tehran. They arrived carefully sewn up in sackcloth. They had been picked up by a post wagon travelling in the opposite direction, and had been deposited in the first post house, whence they had been sent on to Tehran, their ownership being inferred from my telegraphic inquiries. The recovery of these articles speaks well for the arrangements of the Persian Post Office, a department which is wonderfully well run, considering the backward condition of transportation facilities in Persia. The Persian Post conveys letters and parcels with security and great regularity in matter of time. In East Persia, before we had our regular series of motor convoys running, which, of course, carried the mails, there were two ways open to us of sending letters to India and elsewhere out of the country: either by the Persian post, or by the consular camel-men who took letters to and from the Indian post office at the frontier and the consulates at Seistan and Birjand. I posted two letters on the same day from Birjand to my wife at Simla, one by each route. The one bearing Persian postage stamps was delivered four days before the one franked with Indian stamps. Of course, when we had the motor mail service the Persian Post Office could not compete, and there was a general desire on the part of merchants and traders, even among the Persians, to use our post office. There was a certain amount of controversy over this question. My view was that while it was

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one thing for the Indian authorities to establish military post offices for the use of the troops temporarily in Persia, it was quite another thing for these offices to poach the revenue due to the Post Office of the country by carrying civilian mail. The opposing view was, of course, based on the idea of facilitating trade.

But this is a digression. My journey to Tehran was continued day and night, and I only got what in military parlance would be called "two nights in bed" during the eleven days taken on the journey. Horses were changed at every post house, from 10 to 20 miles apart. This involved sometimes a delay of hours. At some of the smaller post houses a relay of only three teams were kept, and if there were many vehicles on the road no change would be available. In any case, it is difficult to "hustle the East" on these occasions, but I discovered a method of speeding up the process which is worth bringing to the notice of future travellers in Persia. The coachman is an integral part of the team and changes with his horses. At the end of his run he comes forward, as is only natural, for the customary "tip." When one is sleeping as soundly as the configuration of a *kaliské* will allow, the custom is apt to be disconcerting and liable to make one wish that Messrs. Lyons, of London restaurant and hotel fame, could be induced to take up the contracts for the Persian postal staging system. But there is a silver lining to every cloud, and I found that the

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system could be made itself to hustle the East in a way that the European proverbially cannot do. It was to refuse to donate the outgoing coachman till the incoming one reported all ready to proceed, the donation being suitably increased in proportion to the hustling-up energy displayed by the outgoing jehu.

On only one occasion did I find this method fail, and that was when the outgoing jehu evidently had some attraction in the village that outweighed that of the hoped-for pecuniary reward, and I was left dozing for three hours in a horseless vehicle. Efforts of the servants having failed to rouse the *surchi* or coachman community of the post to a sense of their duties, I had perforce to visit the dens inhabited by these gentry myself. I happened to have the good, or bad, fortune to have acquired from the servants, when I was a small boy in Tehran, an extensive repertoire of the choicest Persian ungentlemanly remarks. The semi-sleeping *surchis*, hearing such a vocabulary issuing from the mouth of a European, evidently thought that the devil was amongst them in human form. The horses were then harnessed up in what was probably record time for that post house.

I met with many marks of courtesy from Persian officials *en route*, and escorts from the *gendarmerie* guarding the route accompanied my vehicles in many places. At Shahrud I was met outside the town by a detachment of Persian cavalry, who

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escorted me into it. At Semnan the local troops turned out and lined the road, and the officers of the local *gendarmerie* battalion very kindly asked me to dine with them. On this occasion I heard a remark from a young Persian officer which could not but recall the immortal Hajji Baba. It was to the effect that in the army promotion has one very desirable result, that of increased safety, as the higher the rank, the farther back from the firing line!

At last, on the morning of December 13, after a journey that appeared to be becoming interminable, the welcome sight of Mount Demavend, towering above the rest of the Elburz range, indicated the approaching end of the long trek. The view of Tehran as one approaches it from the Khorasan road is a particularly beautiful one, and the various familiar sights of the landscape brought back many memories of a happy childhood spent among them. Tehran lies in a sort of cup, surrounded on three sides by mountains. On the north the ground slopes upwards for some 10 miles to the foot of the snow-clad range of the Elburz, the crest of which is some 12,000 feet high. On these slopes lie the wooded gardens to which all Tehran, which can afford to do so, resorts during the summer months. Outlying spurs of the main range curl round Tehran on the east and south-east, and at the end of one of them lies the gilt domed shrine of Shah Abdul Azim, to which the religious-minded of Tehran

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resort regularly on Fridays, the Sabbath of the Mohammedan week. Close by are the ruins of Rhei, of ancient history. In the west a succession of foothills of the Elburz run in the direction of Kazvin, while to the south-west of the capital lies the fertile plain of Tehran, over which run the roads to Qum, Sultanabad and Hamadan. And towering above all, the most prominent figure of the landscape, lies the mighty conical peak of Demavend, raising its hoary head 19,000 feet into the sky. Such was the welcome and familiar sight which greeted me as the vehicles, which had been my home for eleven days, rattled towards the Meshed gate of the town, where a messenger awaited me and conducted me to the hospitable house of Mr. Maclean, in the British Legation grounds, where quarters had been provided for me. I was then able to enjoy what only those who have travelled in out-of-the-way parts of the East, and have had to be satisfied with impromptu ablutions for several days, can fully realize the luxury of, and that is a large bath and an unlimited supply of hot water.

With the exception of a few matters which were referred to me from time to time for opinion or elucidation, my connection with East Persia was now at an end. The force in Khorasan and the East Persian line of communications under my successors were maintained for nearly a year after my departure, and were finally withdrawn into India in the autumn of 1920.

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CHAPTER XIV

EAST PERSIA AS A FIELD FOR INDIAN TRADE

The sketch of our life and work in East Persia, contained in these pages, would be incomplete without a reference to the importance, or otherwise, from a commercial point of view, of East Persia to India, and through India to the British Empire at large, and the manner in which that importance has been affected by our military operations in this part of the world.

There will probably be few who will be prepared to dispute the assertion that trade and commerce constitute the vital fluid on which the British Empire depends for its life. It is this vital fluid which has caused its body to grow and expand, and in proportion as this vital fluid flows through its veins with strength and vigour, or stagnates, so does the health of the Empire flourish or languish. Those who obtain the lion's share of the honours that the Empire has to bestow, who obtain the most prominent places in the roll of the Empire's great men, are the soldiers and sailors who have won the Empire's victories and the statesmen and

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politicians who have moulded her destinies. And yet, if we come to think of it, how slender would be their claim to a place in the Temple of Fame were it not for the merchants and traders, those vast armies of silent workers who propel the Empire's vitalizing fluid through its various channels! Is not, after all, protection to, and clearing the way for, these silent workers the chief *raison d'être* of the great ones, and would not their achievements be but barren of results but for them?

That war and military operations are an evil and a calamity no one will deny, least of all the soldier who is brought most closely into contact with war and all that war brings in its train, and of all the evils caused by war by far the greatest is the disturbance, frequently absolute stopping up, of the channels through which this vitalizing fluid flows. In some cases, possibly but few cases, the disturbance may have the effect of cleaning out the channel and causing the fluid to flow afterwards more vigorously than before, thereby exemplifying the old adage about ill winds blowing people some good.

By this test must be judged whether our operations in East Persia, quite apart from the causes which led to their being undertaken, are to be regarded as one of the wholly unmixed evils which the Empire has had to suffer in consequence of the outbreak of the world war or not. Has the disturbance to this particular channel had the result of increasing

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or diminishing the subsequent flow of our vital fluid along it?

Prior to the war this particular channel was choked up with many weeds and obstructions which prevented a good flow along it. It had, moreover, a bad leak at the top end which would have precluded the possibility of a good head of fluid being maintained in it from our end, even if the obstructions had not been present. The war has been the means of removing, to a great extent, both these defects. The obstructions have been largely removed as a result of our military operations. The leak has been stopped, not certainly by our military efforts, nor by conditions desired by us, but by circumstances in Russia which are one of the by-products of the war. Will the traders and merchants, those who propel this vital fluid of the Empire, take advantage of the altered condition which this particular channel now presents to them? On this must depend the answer to the question asked in the previous paragraph. It is perhaps too soon as yet to give the answer, it cannot be too soon to bring as prominently as possible to the notice of India and her merchants the altered conditions which have arisen in this particular channel. Such, briefly, and in metaphor, is the substance of what there is to be said in this chapter.

Before the war there were two serious factors mitigating against Indian trade with East Persia, the physical difficulties of the route and the fact

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that we had a rival in Russia who had considerable advantages of position as compared with the Indian merchant. The physical difficulties of the route have already been described and need no enlargement here. The extension of the Baluchistan railway from Quetta to Nushki gave a great impetus to the East Persian trade, but there was still a stretch of some 500 miles, the greater part of it a practically waterless desert, before even Seistan was reached, not to speak of other parts of East Persia. The inducements had to be pretty alluring to make merchants face this initial obstacle. Russian merchants were in a very different position. They had their Transcaspian railway at the door of Khorasan. It is only 170 miles from Askhabad to Meshed, and there was a metalled road along this route. By other routes, passable by camels, Meshed could be reached from the railway in half that distance. Between Meshed and other parts of Khorasan proper, an area carrying a fair population needing what the trader had to supply, there were no deserts and similar obstacles to impede the traders' operations. Throughout Khorasan and the greater part of the Qainat the Russian trader had, therefore, the field practically to himself. The only commodities in which the Indian trader could hope to compete were sugar, which Russia could not and India could supply, and tea, of which great quantities were consumed by the Persians, and as regards which the distance from China, via Asiatic

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Russia, put a weight on the tail of the Russian merchant which enabled the Indian trader to catch him up. But as regards general merchandise, it was no farther north than Seistan that the Indian trader could hope to compete with the Russian, and even in the southern region it could hardly be said that he did so on even terms. The distance from the Russian Transcaspian railway to Seistan was farther than that from the Indian railhead at Nushki, but the difficulties of the route were far less, and the Russian had certain banking and transportation facilities which were denied to his rival in India. It is little wonder that the East Persian trade did not prove a very alluring bait to the merchants of India. It is all the more to the credit, therefore, of those Indian merchants, such as Messrs. Jowala Singh & Sons, who did succeed in pushing their business into this region. The enterprise of men such as these is of Imperial value and deserves to be recognized as such.

The collapse of Russia as a result of the revolution, the total destruction of her own vital fluid in consequence of the misguided iconoclasm of the Bolshevik Government, completely altered the pre-war aspect of affairs. The Russian traders could trade no more, but the goods they used to bring into East Persia were needed just as much as ever by the population. A void was created which could only be filled by the Indian trader. As I went up and down the line I constantly heard the cry from Persians, " We

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cannot get this, we cannot get that, that used to come from Russia; we will pay any price for them. Can you not get them sent to us from India?" The cry was a particularly heart-rending one for me to hear, as it was the "military," personified in myself, that was one of the chief obstacles to the void being filled by a great rush of trade from India. I was using the transport which was needed for this great rush of "vitalizing fluid" to take place.

The great opportunities for Indian trade in East Persia, caused by the collapse of Russia, were, of course, at once appreciated by our consular and political officers in this region. They made the greatest efforts both to get the opportunities realized by the commercial community in India and to facilitate the task of those who were trying to take advantage of the opportunities offered. Major Hutchinson, Political Agent in Chagai, who controlled the part of Baluchistan adjoining Persia, was unceasing in his efforts for the Indian traders. His scheme to try and satisfy the needs of both military and traders, which met me on my first arrival at Juzakh, has already been alluded to. Another whose efforts in their interests entitle him to great gratitude from the Indian trading community is Mr. B. J. Gould, at this time British Consul in Seistan. He was incessantly working to aid the traders. Among his many and successful efforts to aid simultaneously our military operations and

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Indian trade was a very well-worked-out scheme by which transport bringing Seistan produce to our line took back, on the return journey, traders' goods to Seistan. Major B. Temple, the British Vice-Consul at Meshed, applied the whole of his energy and talents, both very great as those who are acquainted with him well know, to start a stream of vitalizing fluid flowing along the new channel that was opening out before it. He made an extensive tour throughout East Persia, interviewing traders and Persian merchants, collecting the statistics as to trade possibilities and bringing them to the notice of chambers of commerce and others in India. Largely, I believe, through Temple's instrumentality, Messrs. Govan Bros., a firm which did a considerable motor transport business in India, were induced to make an experimental run with various types of commercial lorry up the line to Meshed, with a view to testing the possibility of taking over the road and other facilities, when the troops were withdrawn, and obtaining a concession from the Persian Government to run, in this region, a commercial motor service. The experiment was in progress when I left East Persia. The project fell through, a great pity both from the point of view of Indian trade and of benefit to Persia herself.

But so long as our troops were in East Persia, the chief obstacle to Indian trade taking advantage of the openings offered to it was the presence of those troops themselves. Not only were we using

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the camels and other transport that the trader needed, but military operations, as they necessarily must do, sent up prices, and made such carriage as was available prohibitive in cost to the traders. We were taking from those who had nothing even that which they had. Often was I urged to release some of our military transport. Often was pointed out to me the golden opportunity that had arisen for stimulating the flow of the vital fluid, little as I needed such urgings to realize it. I did what I could, but I was rather in the position of a fireman, whose job is to put out a fire and who is continually urged to use less water so as not to damage the valuable furniture that is in the house. Much as he may realize the damage the water he is using may be doing, much as he may try to minimize that damage, his first duty is to put out the fire. That is what he is there for.

But black as was this military cloud which hung over Indian trade to East Persia at this period, there was also a silver lining to it. Though our presence was blocking trade, as a result of our presence a good deal was being done to remove the obstacles which impeded pre-war trade, to clear out the channels along which trade could flow, which would not have been done had we not been there. The East Persian operations had resulted in an extension of the Nushki railway Persia-wards. This in itself was to be an enormous asset to trade. With the railway as far as Duzdab, the long, nearly

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waterless and nearly foodless, desert between Nushki and the Persian frontier had been left behind. From the trade point of view it is certainly a matter of regret that the railway had not reached Neh, its intended terminus, before the armistice put a stop to railway-making. With the railway as far as Neh, and the projected branch to Labi Baring on the shores of the Hamuns completed, the Indian trader would have had it all his own way in future in Seistan and the Qainat, and even in Khorasan he would have been in a position to compete, on more than even terms, with any Russian trade rivals of the future. And the question whether this prospective trade would have been worth the additional sum that would have been spent on extending the railway another 100 miles, under war-time conditions, is by no means one that can be answered with an unhesitating negative. Again, it cannot but be admitted that the military road, with its various adjuncts all along the line, constituted a clearing of the channel for future trade of no mean magnitude, though its value must depend, of course, largely on the extent to which what was done is kept up. Should the project of a commercial opening up of the line, on the lines of that contemplated by Messrs. Govan, be ever again taken up, and it is to be hoped that this will be the case, then what was left behind by the East Persian line of communications, even if allowed in the meantime to take care of itself, would constitute

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an asset the existence of which might well be the deciding factor in whether the project were or were not feasible.

"But," the reader will by now not improbably ask, "what is the value of this East Persian trade? Persia is a poor country, East Persia apparently particularly so. Is this trade worth making any fuss about?"

I do not presume to be a commercial expert, and if the questioner is only an ordinary citizen like myself, who takes the interest we Britons all do in any matter affecting the well-being of every part of the Empire, then perhaps the generalities, all that I can offer, may satisfy him. If, on the other hand, the questioner is a commercial expert and requires detailed figures and statistics, then he must be referred to the labours of experts like himself. The Department of Overseas Trade collect such statistics regarding trade in all parts of the world, including, no doubt, East Persia. But I believe the result of such a detailed examination would be to confirm the general views set forth here.

The trade value of any region of the earth may be regarded as consisting of two parts: the actual and the potential. And it will probably be accepted as axiomatic that the less civilized, the less developed any particular area is (provided such lack of development is not due to any impossible local conditions, such as the ice at the North Pole) then the greater will be the ratio which its potential commer-

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cial value will bear to its actual trade statistics.

The chief incentive to human labour in this world may be said to be a desire to obtain the good things of life, a desire which the produce of labour is a means of gratifying. It is the function of trade to bring these good things of life from different parts of the world to the doors of prospective purchasers. In civilized and developed countries to which these good things have had a free access for some time, the maximum absorbing capacity of the area assumes a more or less fixed and known figure. A number of factors can, of course, increase this absorbing capacity, but saturation point is always within measurable distance, and no phenomenal increase in consumption can be anticipated as a result of pouring in additional supplies, or taking other measures. It is quite otherwise in the case of an undeveloped area. Many of the good things of life being unknown, no desire for them has been created. The needs of the people being thus few and simple, the results of a small amount of labour will suffice to satisfy them. People will not do extra labour when that extra labour brings them no extra reward. But place the good things of life before them and a desire will be created for them, as has been the case elsewhere, and those who have the means will absorb them. Their example will cause those who have not the means to redouble their labours in order to get the means wherewith to obtain them. The supply will then have to be

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increased to meet the increased demand, and trade will increase in a geometrical progression. In other words, the potential part of the trade value of the locality is out of all proportion to its existing volume. This is, in the main, the argument of those who urge the fostering of Indian trade with East Persia. On this is based their faith that the East Persian trade *is* worth making a fuss about.

The population of East Persia is about 2,000,000, composed of an intelligent race of people requiring but little education to make them appreciate all that trade could bring them. The climate of the greater part of Khorasan and the Qainat is an excellent one, the soil is admirable for the cultivation of cereals, fruit and cotton. In the Qainat these advantages are handicapped by the lack of water, but there are expedients, such as forming reservoirs in the higher valleys, by which it could be augmented, were it worth while to do so. The sheep of Khorasan produce excellent wool. The hills have been pronounced by mineralogical experts to have an abundance of coal and valuable ores. But these many natural resources are largely left fallow for the simple reason that human beings, as a race, will not work harder than is necessary to get them what they want. Increase the number of things they want by creating new tastes and they will work harder in order to be able to get them, and the natural resources mentioned would enable the extra labour to be profitably used to this end. Additional popula-

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tion would be attracted to the area, who in their turn would require more of the traders' goods.

So much for generalities. As regards actual figures, I hesitate to tread on what is the province of the commercial expert for fear of getting into water beyond my depth. But there are a few figures, though I give them only as recollections of what I was told by those who knew what they were talking about, which I cannot refrain from quoting as they are of interest in illustrating the various points that have been brought to notice in this chapter.

Before the Russian revolution the value of the imports into East Persia from Russia were estimated at about one million sterling per annum. By the time of the armistice they had dropped to barely one-eighth of that figure. Before the Russian revolution the imports from India into East Persia were estimated at £100,000 sterling per annum. By the armistice this figure had been quadrupled. These figures show the nature of the suction that was applied to Indian trade to fill the void which was caused by the closing of the inlet valves on the Russian side. They also show that owing to the causes previously mentioned, among the chief of them being my own pernicious self, Indian trade failed to fill the void to the extent of something like half a million sterling per annum.

As regards exports, the figures tell an almost equally interesting tale. Before the Russian revolu-

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tion the value of the export trade from East Persia to Russia was estimated at about one and a half millions sterling annually. By the armistice, instead of decreasing to one-eighth as in the case of the imports, they had only dropped to something less than a half. While Bolshevism in a country destroys the means of producing commodities capable of being sold to others, it does not alter human nature to the extent of enabling it to do without what it has been in the habit of getting from others, though it makes it more difficult to obtain them. The exports from East Persia to India before the Russian revolution were valued at some £50,000 sterling per annum. By the armistice they had risen to twice that figure. But in this connection it must be remembered that while the troops were in East Persia they absorbed a large amount of local agricultural produce which, but for their presence and had means of getting it away been available, would have gone to swell the annual volume of exports from the country.

The above figures give some idea of the existing volume of East Persian trade at the time the Great War came to an end. I am of course quoting them largely from hearsay, but the hearsay is from those who knew what they were talking about, and I believe that, if tested by regular statistics, no very glaring inaccuracies would be found in them.

As regards the much more important question of the extent to which the existing trade could be

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increased by suitable measures for fostering it, I can only again quote what I heard from others, but the others were those whose business was commerce and who had made an expert study of it on the spot. The opinion I heard generally expressed was that taking into consideration the natural resources of the country and the character of the people, the quadrupling of the existing volume of trade would by no means be a sanguine estimate of the potentialities of the region, if the necessary facilities for promoting a flow of trade were to be provided.

An attempt has been made in this chapter to give a brief sketch of the conditions affecting trade between India and East Persia, and of the manner in which those conditions have been modified by the military operations which the Great War forced on us in this region. It has also, I hope, been shown that though the operations hampered trade, as all military operations must do, yet those operations have resulted in a considerable clearing of the channels for the trade of the future. Will the British—by which term is, of course, also included Indian—commercial community take advantage of the opportunities which this clearing of the channels has given them? On the answer to this question will depend the verdict of history as to whether the East Persian operations are to be classed as one of the wholly unmixed evils which the Great War brought in its train, or whether they can more

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rightly be placed in the category of ill winds which have, however, brought to the Empire some little good.

In this connection it may not be out of place to sound a slight note of warning. Commercial enterprise in Persia has little chance of success unless it meets with a welcome from the Persian people themselves and receives their cordial co-operation. Now, the Persians are fully alive to the benefits their country is likely to derive from foreign commercial enterprise, but anxious as they may be to welcome it, their relations with their northern neighbour have taught them that commerce is but too often a cloak for schemes of political domination. Commercial schemes are, therefore, likely to be received with considerable suspicion by the Persians until they feel assured that there are no political aims in the background. Much as the best and most enlightened among them are anxious for the opening out of their country, they would prefer a backward Persia in their own hands to a prosperous one under the thumb of the foreigner. The ultra-sensitiveness of Persian nationalism has often formed a subject of ridicule, but when we remember that their ancestors were building up a prosperous empire at a time when ours had barely emerged from the cave-dweller stage, the feelings of Persians on the subject really deserve our sympathy. It is a first essential for the success of any commercial undertaking in Persia that the people shall be assured, by

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deeds rather than words and phrases, the sincerity of which relations with their northern neighbour have taught them to distrust, that the proposed undertaking is free from any political taint whatever, and that it will benefit Persia herself as much as those who are desirous of undertaking it.

In conclusion, and to revert to the subject-matter of these pages, the rôle of the East Persia force during the Great War can be compared to that of an outpost, keeping watch and preparing for serious eventualities, on India's vulnerable western flank. It is hoped, from what has been said herein, that it will be realized that the menace in this region was no imaginary one, and that the presence of such an outpost was a vital necessity if India was to continue to be a great recruiting depot and supply arsenal for the Empire during the war, and not to become herself a storm centre and war theatre, draining the Empire's resources from other and decisive centres. In carrying out this rôle the East Persia force had to overcome many difficulties of a very formidable nature. It had to do so while placed in the delicate and anomalous position of a belligerent on the soil of a neutral country, and while endeavouring not to alienate the good will of the people in whose territory it was operating. That it certainly succeeded in the last-named task is shown by the undoubted regret with which the departure of the force was viewed by the people of East Persia, compared with the distrust and

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unfriendliness with which its first arrival was greeted.

That much was done and much money spent, in East Persia, on preparations to meet eventualities which never matured is undoubted. But until human beings are gifted with prophetic foresight, this is a form of evil which every great war and great national emergency is likely to bring in its train. On the other side of the account must, however, be placed the opening up, to a great extent, of an area which has lain in the shade since the time of the Great Alexander who evidently saw possibilities in it, the fact that a trail has been blazed for British commerce through Persian wilds hitherto almost unknown to British merchants, and that the way has been paved for the transference to British and Indian handling of a considerable commercial opportunity which the results of the Russian revolution have taken out of the hands in which formerly it almost exclusively lay.

THE END

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Other roads. ... ...

Railways. ... ...

International boundaries. ...

Areas where agricultural produce supplies are obtainable. ... ...

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Direction of flow of agricultural produce supplies. ... ...

Headquarter post of sections with hospital and depots of ordnance and supplies. ... ...

Subsidiary posts with smaller hospitals and depots. ... ...

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